

APPROPRIATING CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM  
FOR (MAINLAND) CHINESE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

by

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## ABSTRACT

“Appropriating Christian Mysticism for (Mainland) Chinese Evangelical Spirituality”

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This dissertation argues for the renewal of Chinese evangelical spirituality by critical engagement with Christian mysticism. The dissertation argues that Chinese evangelicals can pursue life transformation by appropriating the Christian mystical tradition within the Chinese context while retaining core evangelical distinctions. It discloses that Chinese evangelicals have inherited some elements of the Christian mystical tradition. Purposeful review and critical engagement with Christian mysticism provide Chinese evangelicals with meaningful themes, lively witnesses, and practical insights for reimagining the pathway of future spiritual theology in their social-cultural context. Thus, it contributes to the sparse academic research on mainland Chinese spiritual theology and argues that Christian mysticism plays a particular role in its unique development. Furthermore, this dissertation holds that Chinese evangelical leaders should and can work together to lead Christians to acquire spiritual maturity while they are travelling on this spiritual pathway. It proposes an integration of biblical leadership and the social identity theory of leadership for leading a constructive change to the evangelical community. Such a proposal of change manifests the contribution of this dissertation to the fusion of theory and practice in spiritual or practical theology.

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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

### 1. Thesis Statement

This dissertation argues for the renewal of Chinese evangelical spirituality by means of critical engagement with Christian mysticism. This dissertation regards both Chinese evangelical spirituality and Christian mysticism as recognizable streams within Christian spirituality. Thus, considering both evangelical spirituality and Christian mysticism, the working definition of spirituality in this dissertation refers to the individual or communal lives that prepare for, witness to, and respond to the work of the Holy Spirit on life transformation for the salvation of the world.<sup>1</sup>

The definition of Christian spirituality is notoriously ambiguous. Individual scholars cannot focus their study on a comprehensive scope of spirituality but emphasize some specific aspects. In seeking out a working definition of spirituality, this dissertation pays attention to the role of the three divine persons, key areas of the Christian life, and the direction and purpose of spiritual life.

God blesses Christian churches with the grace of Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). Indeed, a believer's life can

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<sup>1</sup> The working definition of spirituality is based on the insight from Bernard McGinn's definition of mysticism, which includes "preparation for," "consciousness of," and "the effect of" the presence of God. See McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv. Furthermore, according to Glen G. Scorgie's perspective, "Christian spirituality is ultimately about being attentive to the Holy Spirit's voice, open to his transforming impulses, and empowered by his indwelling presence." See Scorgie, "Christian Spirituality," 27. Therefore, I argue that spirituality is a way of life that pays authentic attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual life has its *telos*, related to the intentional pursuit of living before God and responding to the work of God, who manifests himself mainly through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. See Underhill, *Essentials*, 10.

never neglect any one person in the Trinity. Where as, many evangelicals neglect the spiritual reality that Christ and the Holy Spirit are leading human beings to God the Father. As Evelyn Underhill notes, the spiritual life has its *telos* that is related to the intentional pursuit of living before God and responding to the work of God, who manifests himself mainly through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> God the Father is the ultimate source or foundation for the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Underhill's perspective opens the eyes of many evangelicals who only see Christ or the Holy Spirit in their spiritual agenda to perceive a holistic picture that includes God the Father.

Furthermore, as Glen G. Scorgie notes, the apostle Paul perceives spiritual persons as those who are keeping in step with the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on the Holy Spirit, who is in union with God the Father and God the Son, sets the point of departure to distinguish Christian spirituality from various non-Christian spiritualities in the contemporary world. For example, George Gottlieb attempts to define spirituality from the perspective of spiritual virtues that are shared by various religious and nonreligious backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> His attempt ignores the fundamental distinction between the work of human beings and that of the divine persons. Therefore, this dissertation agrees with Scorgie that "Christian spirituality is ultimately about being attentive to the Holy Spirit's voice, open to his transforming impulses, and empowered by his indwelling presence."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Underhill, *Essentials*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Scorgie, "Christian Spirituality," 27.

<sup>4</sup> Gottlieb defines spirituality as "an understanding of how life should be lived and an attempt to live that way." See Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 6. He believes that a spiritual being should live out spiritual virtues. He notes that meditative mindfulness, compassion, and humility are among those prominent virtues shared by various religious and nonreligious people. See Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 50. His approach attempts to provide a common ground for people with no or various religious backgrounds.

<sup>5</sup> Scorgie, "Christian Spirituality," 27. Scorgie notes that from a narrow perspective, Christian spirituality connotes a direct experience of God. Stressing the immediate experience of God, Christian

When we mention solely “the Holy Spirit” in the definition, we do not ignore the role of the other two divine persons in the Trinity. When we discern the authentic work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot avoid confessing the incarnation of Christ and the revelation of God the Father’s will and plan through Christ (1 John 4:2; 5:7).

Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit always leads believers to God the Father through restoring his image in them, so-called transformation into the image of God or Christ-likeness.<sup>6</sup> This dissertation embraces James Loder’s understanding that life transformation is a gift from God. Furthermore, according to Loder, “transformation occurs whenever, within a given frame of reference or experience, hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of the given frame and reorder its elements accordingly.”<sup>7</sup> Many Christians testify that the Holy Spirit helps them to forgive someone or to care for someone. They acknowledge that the Holy Spirit enables them to follow Christ’s example to have such actions or attitudes. However, as Loder notes, when the Holy Spirit works to change a person, the effect is more holistic, complex, and fundamental than what these Christians have testified. Therefore, we accept the plausibility that the Holy Spirit works without ceasing, even though human beings may not be able to identify and describe his work.

Meanwhile, this dissertation focuses on three core areas of spiritual life. It modifies the three areas of spiritual life that Bernard McGinn mentions in his definition of Christian mysticism. McGinn points out, the core elements of Christian mysticism are

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mysticism demonstrates a spirituality from a narrow perspective. The concept that I quote here is Scorgie’s definition of Christian spirituality from a holistic perspective.

<sup>6</sup> Moltmann, *Experience of God*, 66–67.

<sup>7</sup> Loder and Neidhardt, *Knight’s Move*, 316. For Loder, the cause of transformation is the hidden but sustaining presence of God. When Loder attended to his transforming encounter with God, his research starts to focus on human-divine relationality in Christian transformation. See Boyd-MacMillan, *Transformation*, 12–13.

the belief and practices that concern “the preparation for,” “the consciousness of,” and “the reaction to” the direct presence of God.<sup>8</sup> He observes that the core areas of the spiritual life do not merely involve the moment of encountering God, but also the active effort of pursuing and responding to the encountering experience. However, as I have mentioned, Christians may not be able to identify and describe the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation. Therefore, they may not become conscious of the specific work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, since the Holy Spirit works on them, they, individually and corporately, become the witnesses of the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the working definition of spirituality refers to beliefs and practices that involve “preparing for,” “witnessing to,” and “responding to” the work of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, this dissertation embraces Robert Mulholland Jr.’s notion that the goal of wholeness in the image of Christ is for the sake of others.<sup>9</sup> This perspective will stand out when this dissertation talks about the encounter between evangelical spirituality and mystical spirituality. Donald Bloesch points out that some mystics care more about perfection of their own souls than caring for others.<sup>10</sup> For example, the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart puts more weight on the blessings received by the souls, which are the souls finding their way home and their love finding bliss at the end of their journey into union with God.<sup>11</sup> Even though Bloesch does not deny the necessity of perfection, he believes that caring for our neighbour is a higher goal than perfection of one’s soul.<sup>12</sup> He

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<sup>8</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 22, 29. Different scholars hold different implications for the meaning of union with God. For example, Bloesch perceives that union with God in Christian mysticism is the return of the soul to its divine origin, the ground and source of being. See Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 37. Eckhart’s perspective of union with God starts with the birth of God in the soul and connotes the union of the soul’s will with God’s will. See Eckhart, *Complete Works*, 92, 181.

<sup>11</sup> Eckhart, *Complete Works*, 573.

<sup>12</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 29.

emphasizes that “spirituality consists in making our faith concrete in deeds of love.”<sup>13</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann also takes a different path from Eckhart’s perception of the goal of the mystical union. He opines that union with God/Christ is to be united with Christ’s suffering for the world, which is the authentic meaning of discipleship.<sup>14</sup>

The main goal of this dissertation is to explore a spiritual pathway that stresses acquiring life transformation among Chinese evangelicals for the salvation of others. Once we begin to understand more about how God changes our life, we become more aware of the role that human beings play in participating in the divine grace of transformation.<sup>15</sup> We need to actively seek God’s grace by opening ourselves to God, following his lead, and obeying his work. One of the perceptions about participation comes from the Christian mystical traditions that emphasize the concept and experience of union with God. This dissertation proposes to draw upon the rich resources of the traditions of Christian mysticism to change the belief and reform the practices concerning spiritual transformation among Chinese evangelicals.<sup>16</sup> To argue for and achieve this goal, this dissertation pays attention to two partners: Chinese evangelical spirituality and Christian mysticism. On the one hand, Chinese evangelical spirituality stays at the center of the dissertation. We need to identify the composition and identity of Chinese evangelicals and explore the nature and goal of Chinese evangelical spirituality. On the

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<sup>13</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Moltmann, *Experience of God*, 73–76.

<sup>15</sup> Dallas Willard argues that merely theological construction on how to acquire life transformation is not sufficient to draw upon Christ’s power for transformation, instead, spiritual disciplines that are in accordance with God’s work are necessary to make theory become reality. See Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, x–xii. Phil Zylla also notes the relationship between obedience to God, spiritual practices, and mission-in-the-world. See Zylla, “Virtue and the Hermeneutics of Culture,” 87.

<sup>16</sup> David Perrin says that entering into the experience known as mysticism is to “enter into the story of the passionate love affair between humanity and the divine. This outpouring of love has resulted in the transformation of individuals, society, and the church in many different ways.” See Perrin, “Mysticism,” 443.

other hand, Christian mystical traditions play the role of supporting Chinese evangelicals to acquire the goal for the development of their spirituality. This dissertation will achieve this goal through appropriating Christian mysticism within the contemporary Chinese context. We need to understand the nature and pattern of Christian mysticism by exploring the visions of the key mystics in the history of Christian mysticism for the work of appropriation.

Chinese evangelicalism has been around for two hundred years. It grew out of the nineteenth century Anglo-American revivals when many western missionaries energetically worked in China.<sup>17</sup> Western missionaries were not only actively preaching the gospel and building the churches, but also enthusiastically promoting social services and building hospitals and educational institutions. Their efforts had promoted the growth of Chinese Christianity until the beginning of the twentieth century. However, since the spread of Christianity during this time included the invasion of western militarism and capitalism, the majority of Chinese people made the devastating connection between Christianity and militarism and capitalism. Thus, anti-Christianity movements came along with anti-capitalism movements, which impeded the growth of Chinese evangelicalism and the churches.

Perceiving the necessity to make distinctions between western nations and Christianity in such a social-cultural context, both Chinese and western Christian leaders

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<sup>17</sup> There is archeological evidence to show that Christianity had spread to China in the seventh century by Nestorius but was eradicated after two hundred years when the royals of the Tang Dynasty became hostile to religions. Christianity became active again because the royal leaders of the Yuan Dynasty were converted to Roman Catholicism around 1300. However, the religious activities and Christian proclamation were forbidden by the second emperor of the Qing Dynasty around 1700 due to a ritual controversy over the worshipping of ancestors. The missionaries were expelled because the rulers regarded them as a threat to the nation and the stability of society. At this point, Protestant missionaries have secretly worked in China since the beginning of the nineteenth century. After the end of the First Opium War, the permission and protection of the evangelistic activities of Western missionaries had become part of the treaties of commerce. See Witek, "Christianity and China," 13–16, 21–23.

had committed to the indigenization of Chinese Christianity since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Because of this particular history of Chinese Christianity, the concept of “three-self” has been rooted in the development of Mainland Chinese Christianity, not only among the church leaders but also among Chinese people and governments. Three-self refers to self-governance, self-support (i.e., financial independence from foreigners), and self-propagation.<sup>19</sup> After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the communist government expelled western missionaries. In 1978, the government introduced China’s opening-up policy and allowed the churches and seminaries to contact western believers and theologians and send some Chinese leaders overseas for theological training. However, interaction with westerners continues to be very limited. In any case, the Religious Affairs Bureau supervises these activities. Therefore, Mainland Chinese Christianity has taken a route of development that is distinct from that of Overseas Chinese Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

In recent years, Mainland Chinese Christianity has undergone rapid growth, but related research has fallen behind, comparing it to that of Overseas Chinese Christianity. Because of the limitation of the scope of the research, this dissertation focuses on

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<sup>18</sup> The effort of indigenization was a response to anti-Christianity movements and anti-capitalism movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was also an action to restore the pattern of the apostolic churches in the New Testament. Meanwhile, it was a prophetic preparation for the persecution following the establishment of the new political regime governed by the Chinese Communist Party.

<sup>19</sup> Luo, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Shi*, 327–29, 500, 649. See also Ma, *Jianlihui*, 112–14.

<sup>20</sup> It is important to understand that Mainland Chinese Christianity is very different from Overseas Chinese Christianity. Many scholars get to know Overseas Chinese theology, such as theology from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or North America. However, since many Chinese theological works do not indicate their specific regional background, the readers may take it for granted that “Chinese” refers to all the Chinese people in the world. Along with the growing awareness that the social-cultural context matters for the construction of theology, scholars begin to analyze and accept the distinctions between the theologies of different ethnicities. The contextual distinctions between mainland Chinese and overseas Chinese are so huge that we cannot take Overseas Chinese Christianity as Mainland Chinese Christianity, even though the people involved are from the same ethnicity.

Mainland Chinese evangelicalism, in light of its connection with Overseas Chinese evangelicalism, especially those in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States.<sup>21</sup>

“Evangelical” is neither a denominational label nor a label for Chinese churches.<sup>22</sup> Chinese churches do not commonly adopt a membership system. The participants of the churches have high levels of fluidity. Therefore, when the leader or leaders of a church claim to be evangelical, it does not mean that their church is evangelical. While the church does not claim to be evangelical, some people or some groups of people in that church may regard themselves as evangelical.

Meanwhile, the “evangelical” identity has become important to more and more believers in Mainland China. These believers affirm the core theological elements of evangelical doctrines, such as the Bible as God’s Word, one God and three Divine Persons, the divinity of Jesus, the necessity of salvation for humanity because of sinfulness, the absolute essentiality of regeneration, the necessity of the godly life, resurrection for either eternal life or eternal condemnation, and spiritual unity of the believers in Christ. As Bloesch emphasizes, evangelical identity lies in its unique doctrinal conviction and the experiential demonstration of faith in both individual life and communal life.<sup>23</sup> Mainland Chinese evangelical theology has not been well developed

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<sup>21</sup> According to the average estimation, the population of Chinese Protestants in Mainland China is around 70,000,000 in 2008. While according to the statistics provided by the Chinese Coordination Center of World Evangelism, the number of Christians (including Roman Catholic) is around 1,100,000 in Taiwan in 2009, 321,000 in Hong Kong in 2010, 280,000 in Canada in 2006, and 1,250,000 in the United States in 2010. See “Haiwai Huaren,” 8. In this dissertation, Chinese evangelicalism refers to Mainland Chinese evangelicalism. I will identify Chinese evangelicalism in other places by its location.

<sup>22</sup> The evangelicals from their particular cultural backgrounds have different views on the definition of evangelicalism. See Timothy Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” 1–3. For the emergence and development of evangelicalism, please refer to McGrath’s *Evangelicalism*.

<sup>23</sup> Bloesch, *Evangelical Renaissance*, 48–79. He believes that evangelicals should hold on to the doctrines such as the sovereignty of God, the divine authority of the Scripture, total depravity, Christ’s substitutionary atonement, salvation by grace, salvation through faith alone, the primacy of proclamation, scriptural holiness, the spiritual mission of the church, and the personal return of Christ.

yet.<sup>24</sup> However, following the advocacy of the socialist government, some Chinese theological scholars and Christian leaders are trying to speed up the agenda to sinicize Christianity.<sup>25</sup> They are trying to build a Chinese theology that can advocate developing socialism and bear a strong flavour of Chinese traditional culture. Facing such a challenge, Chinese evangelicals feel the urgency to affirm the core evangelical doctrines.

Apart from the affirmation of core evangelical doctrines, Chinese evangelicalism has developed the distinctions that give it a sense of identity and purpose. Paul Meng observes that these distinctions include faith in the authority of the Bible, faith in Jesus Christ as the sole Saviour through his crucifixion and resurrection, faith in the vigorous spiritual experience, and faith in obeying God's commission to preach the gospel.<sup>26</sup> These characteristics are similar to David Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral: Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism, and Activism.<sup>27</sup> However, when the Chinese social-cultural context urges Chinese evangelicals to demonstrate their faith through ethical conduct and patriotic passion, they may be preoccupied with being good Chinese citizens but neglect the ultimate purpose of presenting their faith, which is winning the lost souls for Christ for the glory of God. Therefore, Chinese evangelicalism needs to cling to these distinctions. Concerning their evangelical identity, Chinese evangelicals quickly separate

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<sup>24</sup> The main contributors to overall Chinese evangelical theology come from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and North America. See Leung and Chu, *Zhongguo Wenhua Chujing*, xxiii–xxiv.

<sup>25</sup> The sinicization of Christianity refers to the socialist government's effort to make Christianity in China bear the characteristics of Chinese socialism. The effort to sinicize Christianity has its origin in the indigenous movement of Chinese Christianity. However, the socialist government tries to use this concept to rule out the western influence on Chinese Christianity. On the one hand, it attempts to eradicate the potential western political infiltration. On the other hand, it forces Chinese Christianity to blend into the ideology and structure of the Chinese socialist society and submit to the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. Some Chinese Christian leaders, churches, and seminaries follow the government's advocacy of sinicization, while many Chinese evangelicals resist the process.

<sup>26</sup> Meng, "Wuxunzhong zai Zhongguo," 6.

<sup>27</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 16.

themselves from those “liberals” who, they think, tend to side with the government’s advocacy of the sinicization of Christianity to support socialism.<sup>28</sup>

Another feature of evangelicals is “relevance.” Contemporary evangelicals understand that faith or religion is a way of a holistic life. Therefore, they are concerned about whether they can live out the doctrines in their life situations. Thus, they pay attention to their life context. They are aware of the tension between their context and their beliefs. They strive to retain orthodox beliefs while finding their place in the context. In this regard, Chinese evangelicals struggle to be both Chinese and Christian. While prioritizing their identity as a Christian, they realize that they cannot put aside their Chinese identity if they intend to plant the gospel deeply in this most populous nation. They have witnessed the impact of the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming a large group of people in their life context, even though they accept the reality that they may not change the culture of the whole nation.

Furthermore, evangelicalism is “receptive” in the name of Christ. Chinese evangelicals are quick learners, critically learning from both non-Chinese evangelicals and non-evangelical Christians. They acknowledge their connection with the worldwide evangelical movement, especially after Hong Kong evangelicals play the role of bridge in this connection after the handover of Hong Kong’s sovereignty right in 1997. Even though they are segregated from global evangelicals by the government’s religious policy, they are wise in employing the strategy, technique, and opportunities to get in touch with the worldwide evangelicals or Christians as much as possible.

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<sup>28</sup> Due to the difference of cultural-social context, Chinese evangelicals do not clearly distinguish themselves from “fundamentalists” as those evangelicals in the United States. See McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 22.

It is against this background that this dissertation sets out to explore the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality. Therefore, the nature of Chinese evangelical spirituality is the life of Chinese evangelicals that focus on the Word and Salvation through Christ that generate constant inner and outer regeneration or transformation because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this inner and outer transformation is to testify to God in the world and to lead the world to Christ for the glory of God. Thus, we need to explore what this kind of life looks like in the contemporary Chinese context.

Some scholars or theologians may perceive this life as primarily a life of spiritual disciplines or practices. Alister McGrath notes that “The word *spirituality* has gained virtually universal acceptance as the best means of designating the group of spiritual disciplines that focus on deepening the believer’s relationship with God and enhancing the life of the Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> For McGrath, the word “spirituality” is the alternative word for “piety,” “godliness,” and “spiritual theology.” He perceives the habitual life of spiritual practices as a life of piety. Many practitioners believe that such a kind of life would allow the Holy Spirit to work in their situation, bring them closer to God, and make the grace of transformation possible. Evan Howard proposes the practices of evangelical spirituality such as reading, studying, meditating on the Scripture, preaching, hearing, and reading sermons; family worship; singing; intercessory prayer as the core. There are still others—the development of small groups, the practice of having revivals, giving testimony, Sabbath-keeping, and journal writing.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method,” 21.

<sup>30</sup> Howard, “Evangelical Spirituality,” 181–85.

While Simon Chan regards these spiritual practices as spiritual exercises, he points out that these exercises are and should be shaped by the perceptions of God, humanity, salvation, and the church.<sup>31</sup> Chan introduces themes of prayer, God and self, the Word, the world, the rule of life, the discernment of spirits, and spiritual direction, to provide a praxis to bridge theoretical theology and the life transformed by it.<sup>32</sup> Following the guidance of this praxis, evangelicals can creatively design the practices that help them achieve their purpose while maintaining attunement to their life context.

This dissertation will employ Chan's praxis as a guiding framework but will expand this by exploring the plausibility of drawing upon Christian mysticism. The blending of belief and practices with the tenets of mysticism will advance the perspective of a flourishing Chinese evangelical spirituality. The goal of Chinese evangelical spirituality is to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into a group of people who follow Christ into the world, testify that Christ is the Savior, win lost souls through salvation in Christ, and bring glory to God. These goals together make up a unique way of life. To be able to live this kind of life in the Chinese context, Chinese evangelicals must adhere to God's will through all kinds of self-sacrifice. This dissertation will expand on this by asserting that the fundamental way to accomplish this is in union with God.

Union with God is a constant status of being and practice that keeps the believers in God/Christ/the Holy Spirit in all of life's challenges, struggles, and circumstances.<sup>33</sup> This dissertation argues that Christian mysticism can advance the nurture of wisdom, through which Chinese evangelicals can achieve their goals and purposes. It also explores

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<sup>31</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 126.

<sup>32</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 10–11.

<sup>33</sup> In this dissertation, "Spirit" (with the uppercase "S") refers to the Holy Spirit, while "spirit" (with the lowercase "s") may refer to the human spirit or angel or demon.

what kind of process Chinese evangelicals will need to acquire such wisdom as demonstrated in Christian mysticism. In this way, this dissertation seeks to advance our knowledge of Christian mysticism, especially given the practice and spiritual orientation of Chinese evangelicals.

The essence of Christian mysticism is the devotees' union with God.<sup>34</sup> There have been attempts to define Christian mysticism, but these definitions are quite varied. As I have mentioned before, the contemporary theologian McGinn defines Christian mysticism as the parts, or element, of Christian "belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of . . . a direct and transformative presence of God."<sup>35</sup> He notes that "the presence of God" instead of "union with God" is a better and more inclusive depiction of Christian mysticism.

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* adopts the definition of mysticism offered by D. D. Martin that identifies mystical theology with Christian mysticism. Martin states, "Briefly and generally, mystical theology or Christian mysticism seeks to describe experiential, direct, nonabstract, unmediated, loving knowledge of God, knowing or seeing so direct as to be called union with God."<sup>36</sup> I do not agree with Martin's approach to perceive Christian mysticism solely from a theological perspective and confine its role to "describe." However, Martin's definition reminds us of the role of theology in Christian mysticism that provides perceptual guidance for the practices of

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<sup>34</sup> It is very hard to define the standard to call someone a mystic. Those who pursue the experience of God or encountering God may not appear to be mystics when we compare them to the prominent mystics in history. However, they are on their spiritual journey and experience the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this dissertation applies the term "devotees" to these Christians. I will still apply "mystics" to those who were perceived as mystics by many scholars.

<sup>35</sup> McGinn, *Christian Mysticism*, xvii.

<sup>36</sup> Martin, "Mysticism," 570. The term "mysticism" came to be used in the seventeenth century in France. Before that, there existed "mystical" and "mystical theology." See Schwanda, *Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism*, 198; and Schmidt, "Making of Modern 'Mysticism,'" 273.

the devotees and the understanding of their experience. Therefore, Martin's definition confirms the importance of "belief" in mysticism. The mystics have inherited and formed certain beliefs amid their experience.

Furthermore, the early twentieth-century Anglo-Catholic writer, Underhill defines mysticism as "the art of union with Reality."<sup>37</sup> She regards God as the Reality of the world. Thus, distinguishing the authentic reality from the assumed reality, she grounds it in God the Reality. Rather than the belief and the practices of human beings, the existence of the Reality defines the reality. Meanwhile, Underhill emphasizes the role of the artful practices of mysticism in pursuing authentic reality. Therefore, she underscores the value of mysticism by the object of its pursuit: the Ultimate One. Thus, she affirms the nature and goal of mysticism in McGinn's definition. Hence, this dissertation will pay attention to the belief and practices of mysticism, especially its emphasis on the consciousness of the presence of God.

However, there are important concerns when Chinese evangelicals explore the resources of Christian mysticism. One major concern is that recent studies equate Christian mystical experiences with those of other religions, thus blurring the boundary of spiritual identity. Some scholars perceive mysticism as a phenomenon that expands the boundaries of any religious confession or religious practice. However, a phenomenon that shares the same outward appearance may not share the same source or the same theological conviction. Moltmann defines the experience of the Spirit as "an awareness of God in, with, and beneath the experience of life, which gives us assurance of God's

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<sup>37</sup> Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 23. Underhill does not confine mysticism as a mere description of the unitive experience but broadens the scope of practice and theory related to mysticism while retains the necessity of intentional effort in pursuing the union with the Ultimate One.

fellowship, friendship, and love.”<sup>38</sup> The experience in Christian mysticism comes from the divine being in whom Christians put their faith. Theology is “faith seeking understanding.”<sup>39</sup> Different objects of faith lead to different theological understandings. Moreover, different theological convictions and perspectives may invoke particular mystical experiences. Meanwhile, understanding also nurtures faith. In this sense, Christian mystical experience requires Christian theological understanding. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to acknowledge the theological implications of assessing mystical experiences. One of the key tasks, therefore, will be discerning the nature of mystical experiences that align with an evangelically rooted faith identity.

Another concern is that the beliefs and practices of Christian mysticism in different periods demonstrate various characteristics. When Martin gives a summary of Christian mysticism in history, he names the key characteristics of Christian mystical thought in different periods. He notes that from the second to third centuries, theologians such as Origen focused on searching for the hidden meaning of the Scripture and exposing the mystery of redemption. From the fourth to sixth centuries, the Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius of Ponticus, Augustine of Hippo, and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite described the mystical experience as contemplation, which means “absorption in the loving viewing of an object or truth.”<sup>40</sup> From the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, Richard of St. Victor began to give systematic analyses of the contemplative life. In the sixteenth century, Ignatian and Carmelite schools, including Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Ávila, and John of the Cross, were characterized by their practical and methodical prayer and their empirical, psychological, and systematic descriptions of the soul’s behaviour to

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<sup>38</sup> Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 17–21.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, “Mysticism,” 570.

assist spiritual directors. During the eighteenth century, mystical theology emerges as a reaction to rationalism and naturalism, as demonstrated in the spirituality of Pietism. In the nineteenth century, mysticism bears fruit with the aid of psychological science.<sup>41</sup>

Martin's observations about these various eras of development imply that the emergence and development of mystical beliefs and practices may be related to their social-cultural context. In other words, mystical spirituality, in particular social-cultural contexts, had its particular expression. However, these particular expressions can be inherited, developed, and manifest in another historical context. For example, in Martin's summary, systematic analysis of the contemplative life with the aid of psychological description started in Richard of St. Victor's time is adopted by others, such as Watchman Nee, a prominent evangelical leader in China in the twentieth century. This dissertation will take the position that the various expressions that originated in particular contexts come together to compose a relatively comprehensive picture of mystical spirituality. This study explores the history of Christian mysticism in and beyond the specific cultural-social context to present the patterns of this comprehensive picture. The primary purpose of this analysis is to show that the devotees from other traditions and cultural-social contexts, particularly Chinese evangelicals, can appropriate this comprehensive understanding of Christian mysticism to their theological context.

## **2. Contribution to Chinese Evangelical Spirituality**

Contemporary Chinese evangelicals are eager to seek their place in worldwide Christendom. However, there has not been much exploration of the spirituality of Chinese evangelicals. The teachings in the churches on spiritual devotion usually try to

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<sup>41</sup> Martin, "Mysticism," 570.

get believers to build up habitual spiritual devotion, following a three-point teaching structure: what, why, and how. Simplistic notions of spiritual devotion are frequently formulated such as: “listen to God by reading the Bible” and “talk to God through prayer.” Spiritual devotion is necessary: it is natural for Christians as God’s children to develop a father/child relationship and this is core to biblical teaching. It is also clear that to practice spiritual devotion one must make it a daily habit—preparing the heart, time, and place to read the Bible, meditate, and pray. However, this truncated approach limits the deeper importance of the nature of Christian spirituality. Some Chinese evangelicals turn to western evangelicals for a systematic introduction of spirituality, for example, Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.<sup>42</sup> Chinese evangelicals have realized that they are way behind in constructing Chinese theology, not to mention that they have not yet developed a constructive spiritual theology. One of the purposes of this dissertation is to articulate a perspective on the development of spiritual theology for contemporary Chinese evangelicals.

Meanwhile, frequently the churches remind Chinese evangelicals that they have a great legacy of upholding the value of spiritual tradition. This is an important point that must be developed. While expanding the vision of spiritual life beyond simplistic notions, we must also retain the core elements of this simple spirituality. This is supported by Claire Wolfteich’s insight that “Christian traditions carry tremendous resources for the spiritual life. The study, critical assessment, and creative retrieval of these traditions of Christian spirituality are important tasks of practical theology. In particular, there is a

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<sup>42</sup> Foster introduces twelve spiritual disciplines, grouped into the inward disciplines, the outward disciplines, and the corporate disciplines. Contemporary Chinese evangelical leaders realize that they need to guide the new believers to build up a rule of life for their spiritual growth through spiritual practices. As Foster says, these disciplines call the devotees to “move beyond surface living into the depths.” See Foster, *Celebration*, 1.

great need for more attention to the ministries of spiritual formation, spiritual renewal, and spiritual guidance.”<sup>43</sup>

However, there has not been much detailed teaching and academic research on the Chinese evangelical spiritual tradition. Thus, the Chinese evangelical spiritual tradition has been a weak voice in the development of global Christian spirituality. Therefore, this dissertation helps Chinese evangelicals to refresh their memory of (or even to know for the first time) their spiritual heritage and explore the cultural-social factors that hinder them to inherit and expand this spiritual legacy.

Moreover, the aim of this dissertation is also to provide a praxis to interact with spiritual traditions other than traditional Chinese evangelical spirituality for its development. This praxis includes knowledge about the development of Christian mysticism. This dissertation will explore the similarities between Christian mysticism and Chinese evangelical spirituality that are demonstrated in the mystical elements in Chinese evangelical spirituality. It will also identify the elements of Christian mysticism that do not match Chinese evangelical identity and propose a direction for the future Chinese evangelical theology of spirituality. Furthermore, it will advance the concrete practices that follow such a framework. As an ultimate goal, this dissertation aims to bring about a generative change for Chinese evangelical leaders, churches, academic circles, and Chinese society, especially those individuals and communities having a close relationship with evangelicals.

Chinese evangelical leaders are the potential readers of this dissertation. Many seminaries in China provide no courses on spirituality.<sup>44</sup> Some evangelical leaders have

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<sup>43</sup> Wolfeich, “Spirituality,” 329.

obtained access to education on spirituality when they enroll in the theological training provided by seminaries or organizations outside Mainland China. However, these courses are not tailor-made for Chinese evangelicals, thus they create unnecessary tension between teachings and learners. Furthermore, such attempts tend to ignore the history of Chinese evangelicalism, its social-cultural context, and the Chinese evangelical identity as a whole. This dissertation seeks to address these issues constructively. It provides the contextual foundation for Chinese evangelicals to learn from contemporary theologians and scholarship in order to contribute to the development of a mature Chinese evangelicalism. Most importantly, it provides guidelines for those leaders who have no formal theological training, to explore the waters of spirituality.

This dissertation also seeks to raise awareness of the importance of spirituality in theological training in the seminaries. Currently, the curriculum of most seminaries focuses on theology, Bible courses, church administration and leadership, pastoring, worship, and sinicizing Christianity (including learning Jinping Xi's political teaching, patriotic education, three-self policy, resisting the evil cults).<sup>45</sup> It is essential to open up courses about Christian spirituality to guide the leaders-in-training to prioritize their relationship with God and to aid them in understanding how we might draw upon God's grace and power for ministry.

This dissertation also provides the opportunity for scholars from public universities to interact with Chinese Christianity from the perspective of spiritual

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<sup>44</sup> Nanjing Union Seminary holds a course on spirituality. The student committee has a department called the Department of Spirituality and Ethics, which indicates the effort to call attention to the ethical dimension in spirituality.

<sup>45</sup> Jinping Xi has been the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party since 2012 and the President of the People's Republic of China since 2013. For the courses on sinicizing Christianity at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, see "Jidujiao Zhongguohua," June 2019.

experience or spiritual theology instead of only focusing on the social-ethical, structural, administrative, institutional, or doctrinal perspectives. This has been a lacuna in the research of contemporary explorations of Chinese Christian spirituality.

In exploring these themes, this dissertation attempts to demystify Christian mystical experiences while distinguishing orthodox Christianity from various cults that uphold various kinds of “mystical experiences.” As part of the exploration of these important issues, this dissertation stresses the necessity of discernment and the ultimate place of God’s will over human desire. Any exploration of these themes must discourage the casual interpretations of mystical experiences and seek to distinguish “mystical” psychological phenomena with authentic mystical experiences. Thus, it prepares the way to interact meaningfully with nonbelievers concerning orthodox Christian teachings and critical understandings of the path for spiritual growth that may include authentic encounters with God. Furthermore, the explorations here will help to prevent many people from falling prey to the so-called “spiritual” exercises that business organizations promote for personal gain. At the core of these questions is the exploration of discernment of authentic experiences of God and the role that Christian mysticism can play to augment and deepen our understanding of such experiences.

### **3. Survey of the Literature Engaging Evangelical Spirituality and Christian Mysticism**

Generally, evangelicals have been suspicious of Christian mysticism, especially concerning the doctrinal differences between evangelicalism and mysticism. However, some evangelicals have realized that the life experience of encountering God promoted by Christian mysticism may indicate the authentic work of the Holy Spirit. For this

reason, we must look more deeply at the links between evangelical experience and mysticism.

From a practical perspective, some evangelicals have recommended spiritual disciplines that have been developed or enhanced by mystical traditions that they find helpful for strengthening spiritual life. For example, Simon Chan recommends Teresa of Ávila's *The Interior Castle* for growth in prayer.<sup>46</sup> Chan believes that the devotees' relationship with God, like the relationship between human beings, will grow along with the increase of the degree of the devotees' love, trust, and commitment to God. These experiences are like progressing through the seven mansions in *The Interior Castle*, which indicates growth in intimacy with God. Likewise, Mulholland, in his work *Invitation to a Journey*, incorporates the concept of "stages" into his perception of spiritual formation, defined as "the classical journey toward wholeness in the image of Christ for the sake of others."<sup>47</sup> The four "stages" are awakening, purgation, illumination, and union.<sup>48</sup> While in Teresa's *The Interior Castle*, the first, second, and third mansions parallel the *purgative* stage where the devotees turn away from sin to virtue, the fourth and fifth mansions parallel the *illuminative* stage where the devotees taste the supernatural experience, and the sixth and seventh mansions parallel the *unitive* stage.<sup>49</sup> Mulholland presents these practices as classical disciplines instead of mystical spirituality and regards St. John of the Cross and Teresa as the greatest writers on the stage of union.<sup>50</sup> Such a presentation helps to avoid the suspicious attitude toward mystical

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<sup>46</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 128.

<sup>47</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 79–101.

<sup>49</sup> Underhill regarded awakening, purgation, illumination, the dark night of the soul, and union as the characteristic stages or experiences that presented the progress of the mystics, even though many mystics never went beyond the stage of illumination. See Underhill, *Mysticism*, 169, 170, 200, 246.

<sup>50</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 98.

spirituality because of misunderstandings about “mysticism.” This may alleviate concerns about “superstition” in the Chinese context. Both Chan and Mulholland recommend *Lectio Divina*, a discipline that may seem foreign to Chinese evangelicals, who generally practice vocal prayer.<sup>51</sup> Some evangelicals may be disappointed with Mulholland’s receptive approach toward so-called Roman Catholic categories and propositions, while some evangelicals like Ruth Haley Barton appreciate his approach of interweaving the mystical classical practices with solid theological moorings and scripturally grounded language to guide people to understand that spiritual formation is “orthodox, deeply rooted in our Christian tradition.”<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, contemporary evangelicals have started their risk-taking engagement with Christian mysticism, even though mystical traditions have their detractors and warrant critical thinking. This section does not provide a survey of individual evangelical comments or concerns about Christian mysticism, neither is it an exploration of the mystical elements in the spiritual theology of particular evangelicals. Rather, it focuses on evangelical works that give attention to Christian mysticism. This survey will follow the sequence that moves from the works that adopt the attitude of rejection to those demonstrating selective appropriation.

One starting point may be the stern warning given by some evangelicals against Christian mysticism. Arthur L. Johnson tries to expose the dangers of mysticism in his book *Faith Misguided*. Johnson perceives mysticism as a psychological, emotive mystical experience, including philosophical and religious beliefs that arise from that experience.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 112; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 164. Chinese evangelicals may regard this method of contemplation to be affiliated with Buddhism or Daoism.

<sup>52</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, expanded version, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 20, 23.

He enumerates several major dispositions of mysticism that are contrary to biblical teachings. One of his concerns is that mysticism stresses that the mystics acquire direct revelation of God. He takes direct revelations from God as an indication that the mystics believe that God's revelation through the Bible is not complete.<sup>54</sup> Johnson also argues that mysticism betrays the evangelical belief that "the Bible is the one and only ultimate criterion of truth about God and our relation to Him."<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Johnson criticizes that mysticism perceives that the emotion coming from subjective experience is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup> He cannot accept the notion that mystical beliefs based on the subjective emotive experience are the direct revelation from God, which have higher authority than the Bible.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Johnson is troubled by the claim that cognitive belief in the Bible is not sufficient in knowing God. He opposes the notion of the mystics that other faculties, such as intuition or spirit, are superior to reason as the tools for knowing God.<sup>58</sup>

Johnson is correct that evangelicals need to uphold the authority of the Bible over experience and feelings. However, he advocates that the rigorous exercise of reason, rather than emotion, imagination, or intuition, is the only legitimate way of understanding the Scripture or knowing God, which is not biblical. It ignores the biblical teaching that knowing and loving God should involve the whole person, which Christian mysticism

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 24, 25, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 109. Holding to his perception, Johnson regards Watchman Nee as a mystical theologian because Nee believed in the direct revelation of God. Johnson acknowledges Nee's notion that the work of the Holy Spirit within believers was consistent with the written Word of God and the mystical elements were not equal to or greater than the Scripture. However, he holds Nee responsible for laying the foundation for others to take steps to claim that their direct knowledge from God is superior to the written Word of God. He is also concerned with contemporary spiritual thinker Richard Foster and his writings on cultivating meditation and imagination in listening to God's voice. He does not support A. W. Tozer's claim that the knowledge acquired by direct spiritual experience may eliminate the possibility of error. See Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 110.

has tried to present.<sup>59</sup> Howard Rice rightly observes that “the rigorous exercise of the intellect as a sign of obedience to God” was one of the major reasons the Reformed tradition gave to resist mystical spirituality.<sup>60</sup> Chinese evangelicals pursue piety that involves more than rationality but also a passion. However, the intellectuals tend to pursue the Reformed tradition, which emphasizes the intellectual-side of theology rather than lived theology. Those who follow this tendency may well welcome Johnson’s perspective and resist mystical tradition. A close study of the evangelical traditions that pursue God with both mind and heart will help to guard against the pitfall of this tendency.

Furthermore, Johnson suggests eradicating every mystical element whenever one finds it, acknowledging that the vigorous quest for spirituality among evangelicals opens up the door for the invasion of mystical elements. His radical proposal comes from his insufficient critique of Christian mysticism. For example, Johnson realizes that human sinfulness and self-will hinder devotees from acknowledging God’s truth, but he bypasses the discussion on how to remove the hindrance for a better understanding of God’s Word.<sup>61</sup> He ignores the reality that Christian mysticism is quite aware of the hindrance and stresses the necessity of purgation, especially at the beginning of the spiritual journey. In the mystical tradition, because of intentionally dealing with moral sins and self-will, the devotees acquire more and more illumination—understanding the light and grace of God’s Word.

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<sup>59</sup> Houston, “Evangelical Anti-Mysticism,” 174–75.

<sup>60</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 210. Another important reason is that the reformed tradition puts stress on the faith, but they exercise faith narrowly in addressing the needs of society.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, 58.

Bloesch takes a different approach from Johnson's to remind evangelicals to avoid mysticism, including Christian mysticism, which he calls classical mysticism.<sup>62</sup> He advocates the formation of biblical spirituality. However, instead of repudiating Christian mysticism, he acknowledges its strength in some areas.

Bloesch perceives spirituality as “service to the most high and holy God through service to our fellow human beings” instead of achieving a high spiritual realm.<sup>63</sup> He defines the current spiritual situation as pluralism, syncretism, inclusivism, relativism, and multiculturalism. He makes a distinction between classical mysticism, biblical spirituality, and the new spirituality and advocates for the formation of biblical spirituality.

Bloesch opposes the new spirituality that emphasizes the aggrandizement of the individual over self-denial and self-sacrifice and explores the power of the mind instead of bringing the mind into conformity with Jesus Christ. He observes that people tend to acknowledge one God while accepting other gods and opt for the new spirituality, neglecting the doctrinal substance behind them. Therefore, he reminds evangelicals that the charismatic movement within the churches tends to blend this new spirituality with biblical spirituality.<sup>64</sup> He also has concern that evangelicals may confuse Christian mysticism with the new spirituality. He notes that even though the new spirituality demonstrates mystical features, its features are not in accordance with orthodox Christian teachings.

Under this circumstance, Bloesch notes that evangelicals need the gift of discerning the spirits and should build up evangelical spirituality by drawing upon both

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<sup>62</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 31–32.

the Protestant Reformation and the great tradition of the universal church.<sup>65</sup> This section focuses on the evangelicals' engagement with Christian mysticism instead of the danger of the new spirituality. The chart on the next page presents the distinctions between classical mysticism and biblical spirituality proposed by Bloesch.

Bloesch notes that Christian mysticism may share the features listed in the column of "Biblical Spirituality," but these features are not its focus. For example, a prominent theme of Christian mysticism is the return of the soul to the divine source or self-fulfillment of union with God, rather than serving others, even though many well-known mystics have actively participated in world mission.<sup>66</sup>

Another example is the attitude and beliefs on prayer between Christian mysticism and biblical spirituality. Bloesch has the concern that some mystics regard contemplation as a way of prayer superior to petitionary prayer. He argues for the importance of vocal dialogical prayer in his book *The Struggles of Prayer*.<sup>67</sup> He acknowledges that petitionary prayer remains part of the legacy of the great saints and the mystics of the church. He says, "[e]ven in the state of contemplation the saints offer petitions to their God."<sup>68</sup> He quotes Teresa of Ávila's advice, "[t]alk to Him as to your Father: ask for what you want as from a father: tell Him your sorrows and beg Him for relief."<sup>69</sup> Bloesch's concern and argument lead us to realize that one may misunderstand

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<sup>65</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 63. Some scholars note that Christian mysticism tends to perceive good works as the means to the fulfillment of salvation, not simply as the after-effect of salvation. However, as Amy Hollywood notes, Augustine stressed the necessity of divine mediation that returning to God was first returning to Christ that led to returning to the Father. See Hollywood, "Introduction," 2. Therefore, we should discern individual mystics' doctrines and make a distinction between theirs and evangelical doctrines instead of making a general conclusion that Christian mysticism is at odds with evangelicalism.

<sup>67</sup> Bloesch, *Struggles of Prayer*, 97–130.

<sup>68</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 95.

<sup>69</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 95.

## Distinctions between Classical Mysticism and Biblical Spirituality by Bloesch

Emphasis Motif	Classical Mysticism	Biblical Spirituality
Root	Scripture/Platonism or Neoplatonism	Scriptural revelation
Goal	Ontological union of the soul with the mystical God through love, the perfection of the soul by world-denial and self-denial (transfigured into the image of God), the soul's ascending return to its source	Encounter with the Wholly Other by obeying the Word and bringing the World into submission to Christ
Revelation	Through the birth of God in the soul	In the unfolding of history, climaxing with the historical incarnation of God in Jesus; Scripture
God	Unknowable God above God	Known through Jesus
Christ	Follow his example	Accept his substitutionary death
Voice of the Spirit	Directly to the human soul/through the Word	Through the objective Word and sacraments
Church	Devalue the rites and dogmas of the church; value the invisible church	Communities in the past and present are essential in spiritual formation
The way to God	Self-denial, world-denial, salvation in Christ	Salvation in Christ
Initiation	Participatory (anthropocentric and theocentric)	God searches for the lost
Authority	Subjective and ineffable mystical experiences over the objective and intelligible Word of God	Word of God
Knowledge of God	Numinous in the soul	Propositional truth in a divine-human encounter
Cross	Ascetic disciplines for purgation	Atoning sacrifice of Christ
Transformation	Divination or deification	Sanctification
Discipline	World-denying asceticism for securing one's salvation	Active obedience to the Great Commission
Love	Eros: the possessive, acquisitive love seeking the security and salvation of the self in the Divine	Agape: unconditional, spontaneous, and sacrificial love not seeking its own
Faith	Mystical feeling of absolute dependence	Confessing God's promise of salvation in Christ
Assurance of grace	Effusion of grace into the self and discovery of the divine spark within the soul	Invasion of the Spirit into the soul through the birth of a new self, Jesus' salvation
Prayer	Contemplation on God's nature is higher than vocal prayer	Earnest vocal conversation/petition

the mystics' concept of "superiority" in this matter. We should discern that when some mystics perceive petitionary prayer as a lower prayer while contemplation a higher prayer, their intention is not to despise either type of prayer but to associate them with the stages of the spiritual journey. Every devotee can start the petition right from the beginning. However, no believer can enter into authentic contemplation without spiritual maturity.

Furthermore, Bloesch points out the pitfalls of Christian mysticism in that "it encourages people to place their trust in their own experience of God rather than in the witness of Holy Scripture or the wisdom of sacred tradition; the journey of the soul to God is more important than the fellowship of those gathered together to hear the Word of God."<sup>70</sup> As Chinese evangelicals have encountered abundant mystical experiences, the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality should affirm the practices that lead them away from falling into the same pitfall.

However, Bloesch acknowledges that Christian mysticism is stronger in regards to transformation. He notes that the mystics perceive a priority to be "transformed into the likeness of God through the struggle of faith and obedience."<sup>71</sup> The spiritual growth of contemporary evangelicals, including Chinese evangelicals, falters because they stress the grace of the forgiveness of sin while taking less effort in pursuing maturity.

Whereas Bloesch reminds readers that mysticism "cannot be joined to a biblical spirituality without undergoing a considerable degree of revision. We as biblical Christians can learn positively from the mystical tradition of the faith so long as we do not read into it ideas that are alien to its scope and outreach."<sup>72</sup> Chinese evangelicals can

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<sup>70</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 60.

<sup>71</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 145.

draw upon Christian mysticism in the area of life transformation with careful appropriation.

Bloesch refers to John Wesley for understanding the tension between evangelicalism and Christian mysticism, which demonstrates his attitude toward Christian mysticism.<sup>73</sup> He regards Wesley as a representative of evangelical leaders who warned against mysticism.<sup>74</sup> He acknowledges that the core issues of the warning are related to the contradiction between evangelical doctrines such as salvation through faith alone and grace alone and mystical beliefs such as salvation through spiritual ascension to God. However, he agrees with Robert Tuttle Jr. that Wesley was indebted to many mystics of the church for his spiritual life.<sup>75</sup>

Wesley did not aim for the synthesis of biblical faith and mysticism but sought to purify mysticism because he could not eradicate the influence of mysticism in his life. Tuttle presents Wesley's struggle with mysticism in *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Wesley's life concretely demonstrates how an evangelical in his cultural-social context had engaged with mysticism. Wesley lived in the age of the enlightenment/reason that was similar to the context of Chinese evangelicals. The tension between Isaac Newton's science and the invisible mystical experience, between intellectual and supernatural, was intensive. Many people accused those who focused on the supernatural that they had caused the detriment to reason.<sup>76</sup> However, Robert Webster observes, "many people were reluctant to rescind their belief in supernatural realities."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 137.

<sup>74</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 47.

<sup>75</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 137–38.

<sup>76</sup> Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 11.

Tuttle notes that “[Wesley] has been called a rigorist, a moralist, a legalist, and a lover of reason, but at the same time a stoic, an ascetic, a mystic, and a lover of solitude and contemplation.”<sup>78</sup> Wesley grew up in a family surrounded by religious piety. His home religious education demanded a whole-hearted devotion to God that made him anxious over the inner life in his youth. However, both the Anglican convictions and his Puritan family provided him with a point of transition into mystical thought.

Wesley was irresistibly drawn to mysticism even though he despaired of mysticism. He was attracted to the mystics’ internal sanctity of heart and communion with God and regarded them as the source of holiness and perfection.<sup>79</sup> Most of his devotional literature came from the mystics, especially those under persecution. However, he was aware of the distinction between the Christocentric mediated communion focusing on justification as the beginning of the spiritual journey and the theocentric unmediated communion focusing on sanctification as the end.<sup>80</sup> Tuttle comments that after the experience of Aldersgate, the mystical influence on Wesley was positive.<sup>81</sup> He says, “Wesley was now secure enough in his understanding of justification by faith and the Atonement to allow the influence of certain mystics to flow more freely.”<sup>82</sup> He notes that “[t]he seeds of Methodism were then sown in the soil (however shallow) of mysticism but transplanted in time into the deep fertile soil of an evangelical faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>83</sup> Wesley’s experience reminds evangelicals to hold on to evangelical conviction when they draw upon mystical union with God.

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<sup>78</sup> Tuttle, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> Wesley, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:63.

<sup>80</sup> Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 101.

<sup>81</sup> Tuttle, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 124.

<sup>82</sup> Tuttle, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 141.

<sup>83</sup> Tuttle, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 100.

Wesley's engagement with mysticism had left its mark in the Wesleyan tradition. Wesleyan spirituality, which pursues sanctification after justification with the aim for perfection, has greatly impacted contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality through Wesleyan missionaries' active work in China one century ago.<sup>84</sup> China is an atheistic nation that upholds the power of rationality and science. Many Chinese evangelicals are living under the tension between natural reason and supernatural realities. Wesley's experience encourages Chinese evangelicals to change from a previous worldview of nature, science, and rational intellectualism to a supernatural worldview and pursue the presence of God.

Living in his context, Wesley struggled to shake off the dross of mysticism and find his way to fulfill his commitment to Christ. Some contemporary evangelicals, in the context of searching for insights for spiritual formation, try to bring their readers to be aware of mystical theology and spiritual disciplines.

James Houston doubts the validity of evangelical anti-mysticism.<sup>85</sup> He notes that the emphasis on the validity of reason in hermeneutics is the product of the Enlightenment. He argues that the development of psychology, as a scientific discipline for a fuller knowledge of human being, discloses that faculties other than reason are important in understanding. Furthermore, he analyzes the distinctions between Christian mysticism and Platonism and concludes that Christian mysticism is fundamentally Christian instead of Platonistic. First, Christian mysticism is Trinitarian, that is, the divine

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<sup>84</sup> Methodist missionaries to China were sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church (South), United Brethren in Christ Mission, Evangelical Church Mission (EC), Evangelical Association Mission, American Free Methodist Mission, and Methodist Protestant Church etc. See Ma, *Jianlihui*, 8–9. Methodist Episcopal Church was considered one of the missional churches that had a great impact on modern Chinese Christianity.

<sup>85</sup> Houston, "Evangelical Anti-Mysticism," 163.

being in Christian mysticism is three persons but one God. Second, Christian mysticism stresses the initiation of God's grace in Christ in the soul's return to God. Third, the Christian Fathers acknowledge the acquired moral virtues as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Besides, he argues that the Christian mystics are "aware of the mediation of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, of the reality and the love of God Himself."<sup>86</sup> Moreover, combatting the concern that mysticism was individually oriented, Houston argues that mystical spirituality is intrinsically about love, fellowship, and community. Furthermore, he argues that Christian mystical spirituality is an integration of contemplation and action instead of the segregation of these two.<sup>87</sup> He also realizes that "the gift and experience of contemplation is simply a more personalized experience and fuller measure of sanctifying grace common to all baptized Christians," and it is not the ground for establishing or confirming biblical truth.<sup>88</sup> Finally, he commends Christian mysticism for its embodiment of Christian living, love for God, and desire for communion with God.<sup>89</sup> Houston adopts the posture of defence for Christian mysticism. Thus, he chooses the elements or evidence that are in favour of his argument. Nevertheless, through his defence, we have to acknowledge that there are elements in Christian mysticism that are in alignment with evangelicalism.

Diogenes Allen's *Spiritual Theology* seeks doctrinal and practical guidance from the spiritual theologians in the past for contemporary spiritual formation. Allen defines spirituality as "focused on the Holy Spirit, who brings to fullness in our individual lives

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<sup>86</sup> Houston, "Evangelical Anti-mysticism," 173.

<sup>87</sup> Houston, "Evangelical Anti-mysticism," 168–71.

<sup>88</sup> Houston, "Evangelical Anti-mysticism," 173–74.

<sup>89</sup> Houston, "Evangelical Anti-mysticism," 174–75.

and in the Christian community the work of God achieved in Christ.”<sup>90</sup> Allen tries to answer seven questions by putting together the classical resources with the doctrinal examination regardless of the denomination. These seven questions practically and concretely provide a guideline for exploring the spiritual journey. These questions are related to the immediate and ultimate goal of the spiritual life, the path to the goal, motivation to begin the spiritual life, what contributes to progress, what hinders progress, the measurement of progress, and the fruit of the Spirit. Allen notes that the seekers with various backgrounds may answer these questions differently.<sup>91</sup>

Allen affirms the role of mystical theology and mystical resources in his guideline for the spiritual journey. He includes those theologians and theological perspectives that are distinctively mystical, for example, ascetical theology, mystical theology, the eight deadly sins, the journey to God, contemplation, negation, constant presence of God, direct knowledge of God, and Evagrius of Ponticus. He spends a chapter on mystical theology, introducing the way of negation to understand the hiddenness of God and seek the habitual presence of God.<sup>92</sup> He makes it clear that the way of negation is beneficial in building one’s relationship with God, thus contributing to the spiritual journey. He discusses some controversial issues, for example, in which way ascetical effort does not equate to “works righteousness;” how the devotees can know God through contemplation; and why *Lectio Divina* can be a method of biblical hermeneutics. As an evangelical theologian, Allen recommends these resources to those who are exploring their pathway for their spiritual life. Of course, he also sets an example to analyze these resources to weigh their contribution or hindrance to the progress and the goal of a spiritual journey.

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<sup>90</sup> Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 18–19.

<sup>91</sup> Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 17–18.

<sup>92</sup> Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 140–51.

Chinese evangelical literature barely touches the issues of engagement with Christian mysticism.<sup>93</sup> Lee-Chen Tsai, the president of China Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan, delivers a lecture to introduce medieval mysticism. She distinguishes Christian mysticism from contemporary Eastern mysticism. She also differentiates mystical experiences from mysticism. She notes that mystical experiences can happen to people regardless of their religious background, but mysticism holds specific beliefs that should be under doctrinal examination. She advocates that evangelicals should uphold the gospel of the cross instead of mystical experiences; however, they do not need to be intimidated by mystical experiences. Furthermore, she analyzes the attractive and dangerous features in the works of some mystics with whom Chinese evangelicals are familiar, such as Madame Guyon and her “absorption into God.”<sup>94</sup> Moreover, she classifies medieval mysticism into three groups: Pseudo-Dionysus, Latin, and German. She briefly comments on what evangelicals can and cannot take from these. For example, the German group with Johannes Tauler as one representative emphasizes the suffering message of the cross and the gospel, which are congruent with evangelicalism; meanwhile, the concept of “the spark of the soul” arouses suspicion because it blurs the fundamental gap between humanity and God.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Some articles mainly provide an introduction to mysticism. The journal *Logos and Pneuma* contributes an issue on Medieval Mystical Theology. Yaping Wang, a Chinese scholar on the history of Religion in the world, published *基督教的神秘主义 (Jidujiao de Shenmizhuyi, Christian Mysticism)* in 2001. However, he did not provide a clear description of mysticism. Instead, he spends most of the ink on the historical background. Xiaochao Wang, a professor from the department of philosophy in Qinghua University, explores the relationship between the early Christian mysticism and Greek mysticism in *基督教神秘主义探源 (Jidujiao Shenmizhuyi Tanyuan, Exploring the Source of Christian Mysticism)*.

<sup>94</sup> Guyon, *Inner Prayer*, chapter 24.

<sup>95</sup> The notion of “the spark of the soul” may indicate the similarity between human nature and the divine nature, which weakens the fundamental gap between human beings and God. It may also weaken the necessity of salvation by Christ for the restoration of the relationship between humans and God.

Therefore, Tsai does not provide a comprehensive analysis of what the evangelicals can draw upon mysticism for the pathway of future spirituality. She only gives some examples of what evangelicals can get from Christian mysticism and why they should be cautious of mysticism. However, her opinion may have an impact on those Mainland Chinese Christians who have access to her lecture through videos or theological education.

In summary, the works in the evangelical circle disclose the areas of doctrinal incongruence between Christian mysticism and evangelicalism and some effort to appropriate Christian mysticism. However, the works, such as Allen's book, which encourage the application of mystical beliefs and practices for the spiritual journey of evangelicals, do not consider much the contextualization of the application. Nevertheless, the life of some evangelicals, such as Wesley, has shown the tension and groaning of evangelicals in encountering mysticism. Therefore, we need to consider the life context when we come to apply the elements of mystical spirituality in the real life of Chinese evangelicals.

This dissertation explores an engagement of Chinese evangelicals with mysticism, considering the cultural-social contextual perspective. When pastors or leaders take the theological training courses related to spirituality, they encounter spiritual disciplines or concepts that may have roots in mystical traditions. They may find them strange to their current evangelical identity or Chinese culture. Further, they may find it difficult to get practical guidance to handle the tension and understand the complex implications of these spiritual disciplines.<sup>96</sup> This dissertation provides Chinese evangelicals with practical

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<sup>96</sup> Many Chinese evangelicals may not realize that Christian mysticism is one of the Christian spiritual traditions.

guidance for an intentional robust engagement with the Christian mystical tradition for the wisdom to nurture a close relationship with God in their context.

#### 4. Methodology

This dissertation aims at guiding Chinese evangelicals to appropriate the essence of Christian mysticism to their context to pursue a deeper life transformation through union with God. It is practical theological research on the relationship between two types of spirituality.

This dissertation follows David Tracy's concept of "part" and "whole" for theological interpretation. Tracy says, "explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure-concealment of the whole of reality by the power of the whole—as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery."<sup>97</sup> Every tradition is a limited expression of the whole. As Chan notes, "each spirituality helps to highlight and preserve aspects of the totality of Christian life and belief that would be lost to a single superimposing spirituality."<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Tracy believes that the power of the whole initiates the expressions. He calls a positive response to such an experienced religious tradition "faith."<sup>99</sup> In a word, practical theologians employ faith to interpret the expressions of the whole in various religious traditions and regard them as gifts from the whole. Moreover, understanding the parts cannot be separated from the understanding of the whole, and vice versa. From the Chinese evangelical perspective, I acknowledge the whole as God or the Truth and both Christian mysticism and Chinese evangelical spirituality are parts of the whole. This is the theoretical foundation for

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<sup>97</sup> Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 163.

<sup>98</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 22.

<sup>99</sup> Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 163.

Chinese evangelical spirituality to draw upon Christian mysticism to pursue a better knowledge of God for life transformation.

A revised model of mutual critical correlation guides the structural framework for the chapter development of this dissertation. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat develop Paul Tillich's "method of correlation" and emphasize "mutual" and "critical" dialogue for theological reflection.<sup>100</sup> The development of the correlational model is based on the belief that the cross-pollination between theology and what the disciplines of social science know about human experiences can advance their understanding. A mutual dialogue means that all the participants of the dialogue allow other participants to influence their understanding of the subject of the dialogue. Swinton and Mowat understand that such a model "opens up the opportunity to challenge interpretations of scripture and tradition that may have become distorted, forgotten or deliberately overlooked."<sup>101</sup> It is a dialectical dialogue between the participants that allow the exposure of their weak and strong aspects according to their argument and the corresponding response.

In this dissertation, the dialogue between Chinese evangelical spirituality and Christian mysticism allows Chinese evangelicals to see their weaknesses and strengths, which enlighten Chinese evangelicals to reconstruct their spiritual perspective and practice according to their Chinese context and their evangelical identity.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>100</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 82, 92–93. Paul Tillich applies the method of correlation to encourage the dialogue between experience and Scripture and tradition. It allows the possibility to reinterpret the Scripture and reassess the authenticity of the tradition in light of the insights from human experience. See Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, v.

<sup>101</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 82.

<sup>102</sup> As Richard Osmer notes, the heart of the normative task of practical theological interpretation involves theological concepts, relevant theories for guiding strategies of action, and "past and present practices of the Christian tradition that provide normative guidance in shaping the patterns of the Christian life." See Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 8.

both Chinese evangelical spirituality and Christian mystical spirituality involve theology and life experiences in their cultural-social context. It involves the tools and theories for reading culture and sociology regarding identity and changes. Culture is a way of life. Spirituality is also a way of life. When this dissertation bases its research on the resources of spiritual theology and experiences, it affirms the necessity to face the reality of the correlational relationship between theology and experiences. Moreover, the research on experiences intentionally and unintentionally involves social science disciplines, whether underdeveloped or well developed.

Regarding the relationship between theology and the disciplines of social science, this dissertation holds that the Holy Spirit can guide researchers to perceive the aspects of social science that can contribute to theological construction and transform these aspects of social science through the salvific work of Christ. In other words, understanding spirituality from cultural-social perspectives can benefit from social science disciplines when it is under the scrutinization of a Christ-centered redemptive perspective.

Therefore, this dissertation puts theology at the center of dialogue when it encounters social science disciplines. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger is aware of the danger of the collision between theology and the social sciences. She proposes a Christological perspective of interdisciplinary dialogue, emphasizing the indissoluble differentiation and inseparable unity, indestructible order and logical priority of the partakers. She puts theology in the place of logical priority over other disciplines.<sup>103</sup>

As in Donald Capps' "convergence model," theology and other disciplines are "on convergent paths moving toward an imagined vanishing point."<sup>104</sup> Both theology and

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<sup>103</sup> van Deusen Hunsinger, *New Interdisciplinary Approach*, 63–69.

<sup>104</sup> Capps, "Method," 553.

other disciplines can work together to understand the researcher's subject in depth. While theology serves as a centric tendency that directs the attention to the center of the subject, other disciplines as eccentric tendencies are outside the center. However, if theology's spiritual power activates the elements in other disciplines, they will be responsive to theology. These elements can contribute to a deeper understanding of theology. They can even mediate the division in theology.<sup>105</sup> God's redemptive work can bring the inquiry outside theology to conversion and correct theologians' false consciousness of theology.<sup>106</sup>

Besides the relationship between theology and social sciences, this dissertation focuses on the dialogue between the two main partners: Chinese evangelical spirituality and Christian mystical spirituality. This dissertation also adopts Capps' "convergence model" and holds Chinese evangelical theological identity at the center. Therefore, mystical traditions, cultural concepts, and psychological experiences are open to the critique of evangelical theology, especially Christology; meanwhile, Chinese evangelicals listen to the voice of mysticism, cultural-social identity, and psychological components. Such an approach allows the power of Christ to lead the research to explore a vision of future Chinese evangelical spirituality that surpasses the contemporary one.

The structural framework of the whole dissertation adopts the four phases of research highlighted in the revised model of mutual critical correlation: first, to identify a current situation for research; second, to explore the complex meanings within the situation; third, to cultivate critical reflection on the situation in light of scripture and

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<sup>105</sup> Capps, "Method," 553–54, 556. Capps uses the centric and eccentric tendencies in the paintings to illustrate the relationship between theology and other disciplines.

<sup>106</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 92–93.

tradition; fourth, to construct guidance for the transformation of the situation.<sup>107</sup> Adopting this model as the structural framework, the dissertation provides a thick description of the current situation of Chinese Evangelical spirituality (chapter 3). It includes a presentation of challenges, such as syncretism of Christianity with Chinese traditional cultures and popular cults, the attempt of the government to synthesize Christianity to socialist values, intellectual pursuit, spiritual quest, the persecution by the government, and consumerism. It also provides a survey of the history of Chinese Evangelicalism for a better understanding of its historical and cultural context (chapter 1).<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, it introduces the other participant in the dialogue: Christian mysticism (chapter 2). Following this, the core of the dissertation seeks to engage Chinese evangelical spirituality and Christian mysticism in the dialectical dialogue or theological reflection, finding the ways to appropriate mysticism in order to promote the pursuit of transformation while retaining Chinese evangelical identity (chapter 4). The final step is to provide a constructive pathway for the future of Chinese evangelical spirituality, based on the previous theological reflection and dialogue, with a proposed praxis to implement the pathway using social identity theory (chapter 5).

The description of the two participants in the dialogue involves a large scope of information. Swinton and Mowat do not provide a practical approach to guide researchers to have a thematic theological reflection on the themes of the situation. In *Constructing Local Theologies*, Robert J. Schreiter recommends an engagement through synthesized

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<sup>107</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 75.

<sup>108</sup> McGrath notes that “Studying the past allows us to gain insights into how the thinking of our forebears was shaped by the biblical text and by factors outside that text, such as cultural assumptions, understandings of rationality, and notions of logic. Much more of the furniture of our intellectual world than we care to admit is culturally conditioned and socially constructed. For example, the notion of common sense varies enormously from one culture to another, as do understandings of what constitutes ‘rationality.’” See McGrath, “Engaging the Great Tradition,” 147.

themes that can fill in the gaps left by Swinton and Mowat. Furthermore, Schreiter also provides tools for reading the culture and proposes changes. Such recommendations are essential for this dissertation to develop a pathway for a future spiritual theology owned by Chinese evangelicals. The rest of this section is the description of what this dissertation adopts from Schreiter.

First of all, the tool for reading culture. According to Schreiter, reading the culture should consider holism, identity, and social change. Therefore, reading the culture includes high culture, popular culture, social structure, and economic and political systems.<sup>109</sup> A holistic reading of culture also needs to listen to the perspective of outsider and insider, speaker and hearer, and esoteric and exoteric.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the description and analysis answer the questions of identity formation, which center around the group-boundary formation and worldview formation, such as what makes us who we are and how we get that way, keeping the change in the history and the future in mind.<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary to track the history of Chinese evangelicalism, especially its spiritual issues, to construct the future Chinese evangelical spiritual theology. This dissertation mainly borrows the research fruits of historical researches conducted by scholars of various backgrounds, such as Zexin Chan, Weihong Luo, and Weijun Yao from China, Daniel Bays from America, Kim-Kwong Chan and Alan Hunter from Europe, and Yamamoto Sumiko from Japan. Its core purpose is not to analyze the accuracy of the history from a historical researcher's perspective. Most of the primary

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<sup>109</sup> High culture refers to explicit religious beliefs, art, oral, and written literary expressions. And popular culture includes folk traditions, practices, and customs. See Schreiter, *Constructing*, 43. Psychology studies individual behaviour. While sociology focuses on the influence of society on individual behaviour and belief. To understand the meaning of an action, the researchers need to look into its cultural-social context.

<sup>110</sup> Esoteric refers to a group of people with specialized knowledge or interest. Exoteric refers to the public.

<sup>111</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing*, 43.

resources are the works of spiritual leaders, especially Watchman Nee. The survey of the history of Chinese evangelicalism contributes to understanding the main characteristics of contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality: how it was formed and developed in its historical context. This dissertation proposes that the future Chinese evangelical spiritual theology bears the long-term characteristics of both historical and contemporary Chinese evangelicalism. The purpose of the historical research on Christian mysticism is to search the main themes of Christian mystical tradition, preparing for the dialogue with Chinese evangelical spirituality. It mainly draws upon the researches by established scholars such as Bernard McGinn and Ursula King. It also considers the primary literature such as *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Interior Castle*.

Reading culture will encounter the paradox of defining the boundary for the relative stability of the long-term identity and allowing the change in the contemporary context for a transformation of the short-term identity, which should come to equilibrium. Therefore, the factors that define the short-term identity should give way to the fundamental criteria for the long-term identity. Thus, some changes may not implicate deviance from identity when the long-term identity does not change.

This dissertation chooses the cultural texts that speak of identity.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, it uses the semiotic approach to read these cultural texts. Semiotics is the science of signs and their meanings. We can perceive everything in culture as part of a system of signs that generates its meaning and produces its effects.<sup>113</sup> However, some signs, for example, a particular word may have different implications in different cultural systems. A

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<sup>112</sup> Cultural texts refer to the basic cultural unit for investigation, containing a single sign or series of signs, bearing a message. Text can be nondiscrete, discrete, verbal, nonverbal, a set of works, an event, or a person. Spoken and written words are the most common signs.

<sup>113</sup> Vanhoozer. "Read Culture," 36–37.

semiotic description of identity seeks out the governing metaphors, especially those that play the role of integrating the cultural elements. For example, a semiotic description of the transformation brought by salvation would involve the new signs, messages, codes in the cultural texts relating to illness, evil, and salvation, and the metaphors used for tension, resolution of tension, and change.<sup>114</sup>

Second, the model of dialogue. Schreiter provides a model to construct local theologies by incorporating both church tradition and the cultural context.<sup>115</sup> Based on this model, this dissertation designs the steps to construct Chinese evangelical spirituality by incorporating both the Christian mystical tradition and the cultural context.<sup>116</sup> The purpose of construction is to re-orient Chinese evangelical life to be faithful to its goal, which is preparing for, witnessing to, and responding to the work of the Holy Spirit on life transformation for the sake of the salvation of the world for God's glory.

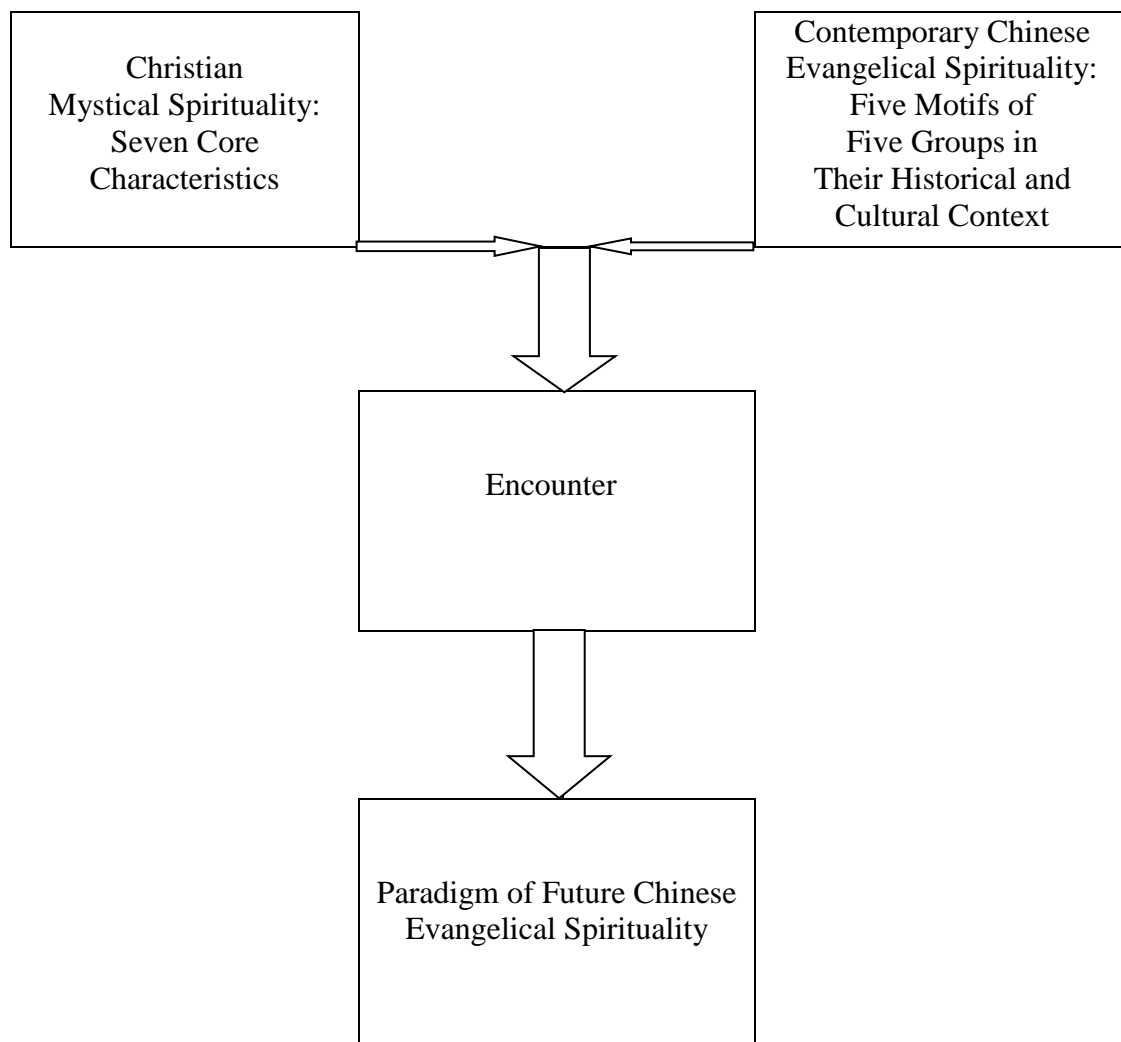
This dissertation seeks the themes for constructing the future of Chinese evangelical spirituality from the description of contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality and the analysis of the current cultural context (chapter 3). The dissertation then moves to dialogue with the major themes of Christian mystical traditions around these themes (chapter 4). The mystics had no intention to establish a tradition called mysticism. However, their work as a whole presents some patterns and characteristics (chapter 2). The interaction with Christian mysticism is first the interaction with its patterns of the characteristics. This interaction provides a solid foundation for interaction with particular mystics or texts. This dissertation explores what changes these mystical

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<sup>114</sup> A sufficient semiotic description of the general change would reveal whether the change is faithful to the evangelical identity or the evangelical transformation.

<sup>115</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing*, 25.

<sup>116</sup> See Chart "Re-orientating Contemporary Chinese Evangelical Spirituality for God."

Re-orientating Contemporary Chinese Evangelical Spirituality for God<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> This chart is an adaption of Schreiter's model. See Schreiter, *Constructing*, 25.

traditions can bring to the paradigm of future Chinese evangelical spirituality.<sup>118</sup>

Many elements of the Christian mystical tradition are at odds with contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality. Tracy's concept of "the hermeneutics of retrieval," "the hermeneutics of suspicion," and "overcoming the strangeness" can guide the dialectical encounter.<sup>119</sup> The hermeneutics of retrieval refers to the theologians confirming their understanding of a certain practice in the faith community. While the hermeneutics of suspicion refers to the theologians challenging their understanding of the tradition and bringing new suggestions for the practice.<sup>120</sup> Tracy holds that an adequate interpretation occurs when "the reader overcomes the strangeness of another horizon not by empathizing with the psychic state or cultural situation of the authors but rather by understanding the basic vision of the author implied by the text and the mode-of-being-in-the-world referred to by the text."<sup>121</sup> The concept of "overcoming the strangeness" is important for the theologians to welcome the new understanding brought by the critical correlation, acknowledging the cultural situation of the spiritual writers but not being fettered by their cultural context. Therefore, acknowledging that the theologians involved in the dissertation have various cultural backgrounds and distinctive psychological experiences, the dissertation searches for fundamental visions of Christian mysticism and confirm or challenge Chinese evangelical spirituality concerning these visions.

Third, this dissertation offers a practical proposal for change. Change is necessary for the construction of a future Chinese evangelical spirituality to fulfill its missional goal

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<sup>118</sup> This dissertation takes into consideration core themes in Simon Chan's *Spiritual Theology*, which include the theology and the life of spiritual practices. Since doctrines are essential to evangelical identity, the themes include not only discipline or exercise or practice but also the doctrines, both of which constitute the personal and communal life of the believers. See Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 125–224.

<sup>119</sup> See Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 131 and Tracy, *Blessed Raged for Order*, 78.

<sup>120</sup> Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 131.

<sup>121</sup> Tracy, *Blessed Raged for Order*, 78.

amid the current cultural challenges. However, it is not necessarily a change of long-term identity. Chapter 5 applies the social identity approach to guide Chinese evangelicals to build up the strategy for a practical change to implement the spiritual pathway that this dissertation proposes.

The social identity approach involves various areas of research built upon social identity theory proposed by Henri Tajfel. Tajfel defines the social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership.”<sup>122</sup> The essential elements of social identity theory include the process of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.<sup>123</sup> This dissertation regards both Chinese evangelicals and those who have been perceived to form Christian mysticism as social groups. It seeks out what Chinese evangelicals define as their identity. Then they can use it as a “secure base,” from which to explore the change for the good of the spirituality. Thus, they can maintain a degree of security against the potential danger of changing evangelical identity when they adopt the belief and practices of Christian mysticism.<sup>124</sup>

This dissertation divides contemporary Chinese evangelicals into five sub-groups according to their worshipping communities. Theoretically, these five subgroups have characteristics that would be useful for their comparison, categorization, and identification to enhance their subgroup identity. However, the ultimate aim of this dissertation is to unify them as they work together to achieve the vision of Jesus’ spirituality by applying the future Chinese evangelical spiritual theology proposed in this

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<sup>122</sup> Tajfel, “Experiments in Vacuum,” 31.

<sup>123</sup> For a sketch of these essential elements and the development of the social identity approach before 1990, see Abrams and Hogg, “Social Identity Approach,” 2–9.

<sup>124</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 116. “Secure base” is the concept brought by John Bowlby, along with his attachment theory. See Bowlby, *Secure Base*, 10–12.

dissertation. It is achievable because of their similarities and their belonging to the shared identity as Chinese evangelicals. Therefore, the division of subgroups does not go in the direction of enhancing subgroup identity. Instead, the subgroup differences sets the stage for the dialogue with Christian mysticism since each subgroup demonstrates its unique needs and characteristics to encounter Christian mystical tradition.

This dissertation also adopt the leadership theory, one of the social identity approaches. Researchers developed this theory in individualistic Western countries. However, research shows that we can apply it to more collectivistic societies like China.<sup>125</sup> According to the research, an influential leader demonstrates high-level characteristics in four dimensions: prototypicality (a model member of the group), advancement (doing it for us: acts as a champion for the group), entrepreneurship (crafting a sense of us: creates a sense of cohesion within the group), and impresarioship (making us matter: creates structures that are useful for group members).<sup>126</sup> This dissertation proposes identifying and cultivating influential leaders who demonstrate these four characteristics to lead the implementation of the proposal. It takes influential leaders to guide the group members to internalize the new pathway of Chinese evangelical spirituality.<sup>127</sup> Both the biblical teachings and Chinese culture value the role model of leadership. The change of contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality under current political and religious situation is possible through the leadership of the local churches.

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<sup>125</sup> Dick and Kerschreiter, "Social Identity Approach," 364.

<sup>126</sup> For more details of the definitions, please see Steffens et al., "Social Identity Management," 1003–1005.

<sup>127</sup> Steffens et al., "Social Identity Management," 1002. Social identity approach needs to consider both the ingroup similarity and intergroup or categorical differentiation. See Deschamps and Devos, "Social Identity and Personal Identity," 2.

## CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORY OF CHINESE EVANGELICALISM

This chapter provides a survey of the history of Chinese evangelicalism. Since Chinese evangelicalism in a particular period of history demonstrated some distinctive characteristics due to its particular context, the survey of this history is divided into seven periods, mainly according to the interactive roles between Chinese evangelicals and western evangelicals. In each period, the survey covers the context, major events and figures, their distinctions, expression of spirituality, and core issues related to spirituality. Core themes of understanding the spiritual life and the foundational expectations of spiritual life are explored.

### 1. 1805–1900

Contemporary Chinese evangelicalism is the fruit of the missional effort of western mission societies such as the London Missionary Society of 1805.<sup>1</sup> Robert Morrison (1782–1834), a Scottish Presbyterian, arrived in Canton in 1807. Morrison was from a Presbyterian family, raised according to Presbyterian ideals, reading and memorizing the Bible and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. After his conversion in 1798, he spent one or two hours every day on reading and meditation, even in the days when he had to do manual labour for twelve to fourteen hours. He also kept a diary, doing self-introspection. His major role as a missionary included leading converts, mastering the Chinese language,

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<sup>1</sup> Uhalley, *China and Christianity*, 23.

and completing Chinese Bible translation for Chinese people and future missionaries.<sup>2</sup> At that time, foreigners came to China mainly for business or trade. The foreigners with other behaviours could be judged as plotting a conspiracy against China and often meant that they could be expelled. Chinese persons who taught foreigners the Chinese language could be sentenced to death. Furthermore, Roman Catholic missionaries at Macau were hostile against the evangelical missionaries.<sup>3</sup> Morrison tried to adopt Chinese attire and food customs, but westerners with Chinese dress would arouse even more suspicions. In such an anti-evangelical context, Morrison worked as a translator for the East India Company after 1809, compiled a book on Chinese Grammar and a Chinese-English and English-Chinese Dictionary, and translated the Bible. Because of his work, Morrison became more aware of the misunderstanding between East and West. He wrote for Karl Gützlaff's *Eastern Western Monthly Magazine* to improve Sino-Western understanding. He also established an Anglo-Chinese College and helped the poor with western medical treatment.<sup>4</sup>

The evangelical community grew with slow progress. William Milne (1785–1822) arrived from England in 1813. The first convert was baptized in 1814. Some believers decided to get baptized while others made professions of faith in secret. American missionaries also came to work with Morrison. The native converts became co-workers

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<sup>2</sup> The earlier Jesuits missionaries in China had done some work on Chinese New Testament translation.

<sup>3</sup> Portuguese authorities offered Roman Catholic missionaries protections. Morrison's translation of the Gospel of Luke was burned by the order of Roman Catholic bishop at Macau who claimed it a heretical book.

<sup>4</sup> Gützlaff (1803–1851) was sent by the Dutch Mission Society. He was called the "Apostle of China." He published another Chinese version of the New Testament in 1836 and the Old Testament in 1847, working with others. But his evangelical effort was associated with the opium trade. Some Chinese "missionaries" in his team took advantage of his effort. They faked the names of the converts, used the fake converts to claim the New Testaments provided by Gützlaff, and sold the Bible back to the printers.

in evangelization. They published Christian literature, including a pocket edition of the New Testament in Chinese to help spread the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

The first ordained Chinese evangelist was Fa Liang (1789–1855).<sup>6</sup> Liang experienced “a remarkable personality change” after his baptism.<sup>7</sup> He wrote *劝世良言* (*Quanshiliangyan, Good Words to Admonish the Age*) that contained a large corpus of scriptures in Chinese.<sup>8</sup> He also edited and printed gospel tracts. Many tracts were distributed to the tens of thousands of candidates who participated in the exams that the Qing Dynasty used to choose people for government service.<sup>9</sup> He experienced rejection by the family and villagers because he chose a religion that opposed local idol worship. While he was laughed at when he told Chinese folks the folly of idol worship, he also experienced Chinese sick people’s heart turning soft when they got healed after his intercession.<sup>10</sup> He once worked as a chaplain in a hospital run by an American missionary, Peter Parker, visiting patients and leading worship regularly. The life of the early Chinese evangelists was mainly worship, teaching from the Scripture, sharing their conversion testimony, praying, and working with the missionaries.<sup>11</sup>

Liang demonstrated the typical life of the first-generation Chinese Christian leaders in a very small Chinese Christian community, struggling with few companions.

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<sup>5</sup> The Roman Catholics rose against Morrison in 1833 and suppressed Morrison’s publications.

<sup>6</sup> Seitz, “Liang Fa,” 49. Liang was baptized by Milne in 1816 and ordained by Morrison in 1823. He wrote a book to explain Christian doctrine.

<sup>7</sup> Bohr, “Liang Fa’s Quest for Moral Power,” 40.

<sup>8</sup> *Good Words to Admonish the Age* has nine volumes, which include *True Accounts of the Salvation of the World*, *Statements of Following the True and Rejecting the False*, *Sacred Teachings from the True Scripture*, *Miscellaneous Explanations of the Holy Scriptures*, *Miscellaneous Statements of the Holy Scriptures*, *Statements of Perfect Acquaintance with the True Doctrine*, *On Obtaining Happiness Whether in Peace or in Peril*, *Excellent Sayings from the True Scriptures*, and *Important Selections from the Ancient Scriptures*.

<sup>9</sup> Seitz, “Liang Fa,” 57.

<sup>10</sup> Seitz, “Liang Fa,” 61.

<sup>11</sup> McNeur, *China’s First Preacher*, 89. Seitz, “Liang Fa,” 61, 64.

They also struggled with family members in the process of conversion. Moreover, they faced the danger of arrest and persecution because the government forbade the Chinese to get involved in a relationship with foreigners. Facing danger, they attempted to distinguish themselves from their foreign patrons and co-workers.

The breakthrough in the growth of Christianity in China came along with the Opium Wars.<sup>12</sup> The Chinese government was forced to sign several treaties that allowed foreigners the freedom to reside in more Chinese cities and interact with Chinese as Christians. Eventually, the political authorities protected missionary work. Seeing that education and western medicine could improve the life of the Chinese poor, the missionaries devoted themselves to preaching the gospel, establishing schools and hospitals, and advocating social movements for women's rights and against opium smoking and trade.<sup>13</sup>

Most Chinese nonbelievers resented everyone with a western complexion because they came along with the armies that created the disasters of war.<sup>14</sup> Even though they gradually learned to distinguish those who ran the schools and the hospital for the poor and devoted to helping the opium addicts from other foreigners, the overall attitude toward westerners was hostile. So was the attitude toward Chinese believers.<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> By 1842, there were twenty-two active Protestant missions in China with one hundred fifty missionaries and about three hundred and fifty Chinese converts.

<sup>13</sup> Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China*, 20–21.

<sup>14</sup> Chinese people not only suffered from the destruction of their land and the casualties because of the wars, but also the money that Chinese government collected to pay the penalty to the western governments claimed by the treaties. Thus, they identified every westerner with their governments.

<sup>15</sup> Some so-called believers were converted because the churches provided food for them. They were called 吃教 (*chijiao*, rice cult) by the nonbelievers. Some believers were involved in lawsuits with the nonbelievers because of financial and political issues. At the same time, the Taiping Revolution from 1850 to 1872 had terrified many Chinese people. Xiuquan Hong claimed to be the second son of the heavenly father and the younger brother of Jesus. He established the Taiping (peace) heavenly kingdom and fought against the Qing dynasty and the foreign invaders. The casualty of the wars reached seventy million. Thus, Christianity in China presented to the Chinese mass a confusing picture of moral conduct. See Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter*, 103.

Yangzhou Riot in 1868 circulated rumours that the missionaries were stealing and killing Chinese babies to make medicine. The riots attacked the missionaries of China Inland Mission led by Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in Yangzhou.<sup>16</sup> However, Taylor did not accept the financial restitution for the loss, nor did he seek foreign military protection, to identify with Chinese people.<sup>17</sup>

To promote the gospel in such a context, the missionaries tried to distinguish themselves as clearly as possible from other foreigners, especially those with economic, military, and political purposes. They, together with faithful Chinese converts, were making sacrifices to form an image of authentic Christians.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the missionaries of China Inland Mission adopted the Chinese way of life to identify themselves with Chinese people, especially Chinese believers. They focused on preaching the gospel and succeeded in gaining converts through their life example instead of through establishing schools and charitable institutions.<sup>19</sup> Timothy Richard (1845–1919) evangelized Chinese intellectuals by interacting with them through dialogue on modern science, religion, and social reform in the areas of education, agriculture, mining, transportation, and trade.<sup>20</sup> Anglican missionaries emphasized the salvation of souls through the renovation of social structure and system.<sup>21</sup> Christianity had made a

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<sup>16</sup> Hudson Taylor was sent by the China Evangelization Society in 1854 and soon became an independent missionary.

<sup>17</sup> After the riot, the British military forced the Chinese government to apologize and pay financial restitution.

<sup>18</sup> The Boxer Uprising in 1900 not only attacked western missionaries but also Chinese believers, regarding them the alliance of the foreigners, the devils, or the traitors. More than two hundred foreigners and twenty thousand Chinese believers were murdered.

<sup>19</sup> Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China*, 23. Richard was sent by the Baptist Missionary Society in England. The approach adopted by Richard provided some evangelicals with the opportunities to influence some reformers in China.

<sup>21</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 46-47.

breakthrough to walk into more and more Chinese people's life, not with gunpowder anymore, but with various evangelistic efforts.

This was the first century in the history of Chinese evangelicalism. It demonstrated the vigorous effort on evangelism despite the huge challenge in this field troubled by wars and poverty. Western missionaries' clear-cut purposeful evangelism had left a permanent and deep mark on Chinese evangelical spirituality.

Knowing the Scripture was another characteristic of Chinese evangelical spirituality. Western missionaries had to translate the Scripture into Chinese or local languages. Chinese evangelicals had to solve the problem of illiteracy. All these required hard work and preparation. However, it was clear that Chinese leaders emphasized the importance of knowing the Scripture. It was demonstrated on Liang's published works such as *Good Words Exhorting the Age* and *Miscellaneous Exhortation* that included explanations of the New Testament.<sup>22</sup>

Chinese leaders expected believers to be content with their current situation even though they were in poverty. They acquired strength to face every challenge in this life when they relied on the Lord through earnest prayer. They had the hope while they were looking forward to eternal life in the future that the Lord promised. Therefore, they were exhorted to live this earthly life for the Lord.

Hymns began to appear as a powerful and popular tool for expressing Christian faith. Shengmo Xi (1835–1896) from China Inland Mission composed many hymns with contemporary Chinese phrases that were easy for common people to understand. Xi also rearranged contemporary popular Chinese folk songs whose notes were catchy. Not only believers but also nonbelievers were to benefit from Xi's hymns. Singing the hymns

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<sup>22</sup> Malek, *Chinese Face*, 319.

helped many believers under trial to become peaceful. It also relieved some nonbelievers from their worry and anxiety.<sup>23</sup>

Since Xi was passionate about evangelism and revival, most of his hymns were for these two purposes. One of his revival hymns was “The Meaning of the Sunday Worship.” This hymn demonstrated the expectation for spiritual life. It showed that spiritual persons would not pursue secular success and be tangled by the daily secular work. Meanwhile, it encouraged them to keep their eyes on the heavenly treasure through diligently reading the Scripture, earnestly testifying for the Lord’s resurrection, and cheerfully giving. Thus, Sunday worship would bring revival. It would inspire one to keep watching and praying. Moreover, it exhorted Christian families to follow the Scripture that they would teach their children to draw near to God and resist Satan. Through revival, they would be blessed with eternal life and bring glory to God.<sup>24</sup>

However, Chinese evangelical spirituality at this period did not emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it fit well with Confucian ethics that encouraged people to be helpful to others, honour parents, and stand aloof and live in harmony with the rest of the community. Believers in the nineteenth century were more community-oriented in that they depended mostly on the exhortation of their leaders for understanding their faith.

## 2. 1901–1921

Chinese believers and missionaries grew rapidly after 1901, which had been prompted by the Martyrs by the Boxer Uprising.<sup>25</sup> Some Chinese believers stood up to lead the church

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<sup>23</sup> Yu, “Shengshi Zhongguohua,” para. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Yu, “Shengshi Zhongguohua,” para. 4.

<sup>25</sup> The mission organization increased to over one hundred in the early twentieth century. Many of them were the well established conservative evangelical missional organizations in western countries. The

independently.<sup>26</sup> Many converts were intellectuals in this period. The Qing dynasty was demolished in 1912, and the Republic of China was established. The provisional president of the Republic of China Yat-sen Sun and some of the reformers were Christian. When Sun asked the Protestants in China to pray for him in April 1913, many missionaries took it as a signal for China to become a Christian nation.<sup>27</sup> However, political and military power soon fell into the hand of imperial powers and local warlords. Thus, the establishment of the Republic of China did not promote the spread of Christianity.<sup>28</sup> However, some Chinese who wanted to learn from western society started to regard Christianity as representative of the culture of western civilization.<sup>29</sup>

The growth of mission organizations exposed the segregation of the missional work in China. Realizing the necessity of cooperation for promoting the gospel, the foreign missionaries called for a coalition movement. Some coalitions were cross-denominational.<sup>30</sup> The primary work was to train Chinese church leaders, many of whom were intellectuals. As a result, Chinese ministers outnumbered western missionaries in 1920.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, western missionaries and Chinese believers became partners in social activities, establishing YMCAs and leading anti-footbinding or opium suppression.

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number grew to one hundred and thirty in 1919. The number of western missionaries in China reached 3,500 in 1905, 5,500 in 1915, and more than 8,000 in the 1920s. They established 6391 churches and 8886 gospel centers and evangelized to special groups of people: prisoners, Muslims, those who lived in boats, mailmen, residents in rural areas, and minorities. Chinese Protestants grew from about 100,000 in 1900 to 366,524 in 1920, and 500,000 before the national-wide anti-Christianity movement in 1922. See Bays, *New History*, 92; Yao, *Jidujiao*, 2–4.

<sup>26</sup> Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China*, 25–26. The number of Chinese independent churches had reached 137 by 1893.

<sup>27</sup> Bays, *New History*, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 1. Some Chinese believed that universal teaching from the West could produce an ideal and perfect commonwealth, at least on the theological level. See Wickeri, “Toward Further Dialogue,” 347.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Presbyterian association, which was established in 1907, was united with the congregational council, and Lutheran churches were associated with Anglican churches.

<sup>31</sup> Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China*, 41.

The work in education systems had extended to the establishment of colleges, universities, and seminaries. Many graduates took up the roles of teaching and leadership in these schools and other social institutions.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, some Chinese graduates from Chinese or overseas seminaries felt the divine calling to build Chinese churches independently. Many of these churches retained their denominational identification, affiliations, and doctrinal teachings.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, some Chinese believers observed that the works of the western missionaries were segregated because of their various denominational backgrounds, and this segregation had hindered the work of the gospel. Thus, they established their non-denominational churches.<sup>34</sup>

Enbo Wei (1876–1919), a Pentecostal convert, established *The True Jesus Church* in 1917.<sup>35</sup> He rejected any aid from foreign missionaries. The establishment of this indigenous church involved mystical experiences. Wei claimed that the Holy Spirit asked him to go on a fast for thirty-nine days and go to a river outside Beijing, where a voice from heaven told him to receive “face-down” baptism by immersion and the spiritual power for exorcism and healing. Wei followed what the voice asked him to do. He also claimed that he saw Jesus, the patriarchs, and the twelve disciples in a vision and received a new name “Paul” and the commission from Jesus to correct the churches. He proclaimed the imminent coming of Jesus and criticized western Christianity, calling the congregants to leave the churches that were affiliated with westerners.<sup>36</sup> The claim to be

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<sup>32</sup> Bays, *New History*, 96–98.

<sup>33</sup> The missionaries did not realize the desire for autonomy in Chinese leaders. They still regarded them working under the leadership of the mission organization until they realized the essentiality of indigenization of the churches along with the growth of nationalism. See Bays, *New History*, 97.

<sup>34</sup> Bays, *New History*, 99.

<sup>35</sup> Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter*, 177, 241.

<sup>36</sup> Bays, *New History*, 131–32.

independent of the foreigners and the practice of healing through prayer had attracted many Chinese followers. The congregants of *The True Jesus Church* rapidly spread into many provinces, especially the rural areas of central China.<sup>37</sup>

The practices of *The True Jesus Church* had been influenced by *Seventh-Day Adventist* and *The Assemblies of God*. They upheld the authority of the Bible and diligently preached the gospel for the salvation of the world. They practiced baptism by immersion in the river with face downward for regeneration, followed by the ritual of foot-washing. Baptism was in the name of Jesus solely instead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Mutual foot-washing was practiced whenever it was appropriate. *The True Jesus Church* promoted speaking in tongues during prayer.<sup>38</sup> The believers gathered to worship on Saturday and shared ecstatic experiences. They emphasized keeping the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, faith healing, rejoicing in poverty and being persecuted, radical egalitarianism without the office of pastor, and expecting Christ's imminent second coming.<sup>39</sup>

Some small groups incorporated the practices of *The True Jesus Church* and local popular cult practices and broke away from *The True Jesus Church*. For example, "the Church of the Heavenly Mother" upheld the "unborn mother" of western paradise.<sup>40</sup> The syncretism of Christian practices and local popular cults became one of the major problems for the development of Chinese evangelicalism.

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<sup>37</sup> The members of *The True Jesus Church* have reached 1,500,000 in over sixty countries at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

<sup>38</sup> Some doctrines of *The True Jesus Church* had been perceived problematic by missionaries, for example, they believed that speaking in tongues was the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, thus the guarantee of the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>39</sup> Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> Bays, *New History*, 130. "The Church of the Heavenly Mother" was the shadow of the late imperial millenarian sects such as the White Lotus.

The growth of evangelicals in China had encountered a critical situation when the bitter disputes over biblical authority, higher criticism, evolution, and other modernist perspectives broke out in some summer retreats for missionaries. The division between conservative evangelicals/fundamentalists and liberals/modernists emerged.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the wars in Europe had destroyed the image of western Christianity as the saviour for progressive civilization. The development of Christianity in China entered into another turning point.

The characteristic of Chinese evangelicalism in this period was the growth of the number of western missionaries in China, while the indigenous influence remained weak. These western missionaries were from various denominations. The believers in the communities of these western missionaries usually followed the spiritual practices with their denomination background. For example, the Chinese Anglican communities used *The Book of Common Prayer* for individual and communal prayer.

However, Chinese believers' spiritual practices were not guided by mature theological perceptions as their western counterparts. When many believers were struggling over survival, their spirituality and spiritual practices were superficial because their theological foundation was weak. Their desire to improve their life and participation in social concern was more liberal orientated than evangelical oriented.

*The True Jesus Church* was one of the few early indigenous churches. The spiritual life of *The True Jesus Church* manifested the influence of Pentecost and mystical experience. Wei's immediate encounter with Jesus directed him to form the practices of *The True Jesus Church*, which in turn encouraged its members to pursue mystical experience.

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<sup>41</sup> Bays, *New History*, 121.

### 3. 1921–1937<sup>42</sup>

The sentiment of anti-Christianity grew along with the anti-imperialist movements because of nationalism. The reformers, most of whom were intellectuals, advocated the New Culture Movement. They promoted a new society that depended on democracy, science, rationalism, and education and claimed freedom from any religion, feudalism, and imperialism. They did not want foreigners, including western evangelicals, to exercise authority over the education system and curriculum because of nationalist pride, even though they acknowledged that the schools helped Chinese people.<sup>43</sup> They resented the imperial power controlling China through treaties and the threat of gun violence. Many reformers believed that western Christians and missionaries had played some role in the imperial suppression of China.<sup>44</sup> They led an anti-Christianity movement in 1922, as counter-movement to the eleventh World Christian Student Fellowship Assembly held at Qinghua University in Beijing. It was significant for these reformers to advocate for the development of democracy, liberation, humanism, and nationalism. However, they claimed that Christianity and missional activities hindered their advocacy, which became

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<sup>42</sup> This period was marked by revivalism and indigenization movement. The establishment of church schools, independent churches, and indigenous churches became flourish. The debates over rituals and the relationship between Christianity and Confucianism were intensified.

<sup>43</sup> The missionaries had established elementary schools, high schools, universities, and seminaries. Fifty-five percent of these schools were specifically for females. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 3–4. Duxiu Chen, one of the prominent leaders of the New Culture Movement, once praising highly the moral teaching of Jesus, now rejected the idea that Christianity could have any contribution to the civilization of China. He was one of the leaders who promoted the anti-Christianity movement from 1922 to 1927. It became a national-wide movement among the students. Along with the movement of retrieving the right to education, the national education associate approved the motion to separate education from religion and deny the right of the foreigners to run schools. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Bays, *New History*, 108.

a disaster for evangelism in China.<sup>45</sup> This movement resulted in the retreat of missionaries and the closure of many schools that western missionaries established.<sup>46</sup>

Responding to this movement led by the reformers, more and more Chinese believers and western missionaries realized the imminent necessity of building up indigenous churches, which advocated self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. When the government requested that the majority of the church school board and the principals should be Chinese, those church schools that responded positively bloomed, which resulted in the indigenization of Christian schools.<sup>47</sup> More churches called Chinese Christians to take up the primary positions of leadership with the auxiliary support of western missionaries. The unified Chinese church, the Church of Christ in China, was established in 1927.<sup>48</sup> However, many conservative evangelicals refused to join because of theological controversies over the Scripture and other issues with modernists who were part of the Church of Christ in China.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the Chinese churches had experienced revival before the Sino-Japanese war. Many newly arrived missionaries came to China with no institutional support but simply trusted the Holy Spirit in learning Chinese or being able to preach in tongues. Along with this Holiness/Pentecostal atmosphere of upholding the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts, revivalism became the mission strategy adopted by conservative

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<sup>45</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 4–5.

<sup>46</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 5. After some foreigners were killed in 1927, the foreign consulates ordered their citizens to evacuate. Over two thousand foreign missionaries returned home. The entire Protestant mission work in China was hindered. Missionaries realized that political factors played a large role in their work in China. See Bays, *New History*, 112.

<sup>47</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> The Church of Christ in China advocated trans-denomination and trans-nationality, focusing on the development of the indigenous churches. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Bays, *New History*, 110.

evangelical groups and independent evangelists.<sup>50</sup> This revivalism implied the exhortation on the direct guidance from the Holy Spirit via the gifts of prophecy granted to missionaries, ordained ministers, or common believers. The characteristic of radical egalitarianism and the provision of direct guidance from God facilitated the rapid emergence of independent churches and attracted many Chinese.<sup>51</sup>

Many indigenous Chinese churches emerged, grew, and imposed their influence on Chinese Christianity. Apart from *The True Jesus Church*, there came *The Jesus Family*, and *The Little Flock*, Wang's church, and Song's evangelism.<sup>52</sup> These churches and leaders attempted to follow the example of the apostolic churches in the New Testament.

Dianying Jing (1890–1957) founded *The Jesus Family* in 1927.<sup>53</sup> The first location was in the rural area of Shandong Province, where the farmers, who suffered under the warlords and the bandits, needed mutual-aid communities. Jing was from an educated, well-off family.<sup>54</sup> He was baptized in the Methodist church in Tai'an city in 1914 but became a Pentecostal because of the influence of the American Assemblies of God in the early 1920s. He organized a cooperative for credit and savings and a Christian silk-making cooperative in 1921 and combined these two into *The Jesus Family* in 1927.<sup>55</sup> Those who wanted to join *The Jesus Family* had to pledge to leave their biological families, sharing their property with the community. *The Jesus Family* divided their community into the male group and female group. They did not ordain ministers but

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<sup>50</sup> Bays, *New History*, 105.

<sup>51</sup> Bays, *New History*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> These churches were dissolved in 1952 because of the religious policy of the newly established communist government.

<sup>54</sup> Jing was knowledgeable and imaginative, trying to put together the perceptions and concepts from Methodist baptism, Confucian ethics, Daoist mysticism, and Maitreyan Buddhist millenarianism.

<sup>55</sup> Bays, *New History*, 131.

elected elders to lead the community. Both male and female members could be elected. The members supported themselves through labour works in the community's farms or industries.<sup>56</sup> The egalitarian practices and the simple, stable, self-reliable cooperative attracted people who sought survival and a life free from oppression.<sup>57</sup> It grew and spread to other provinces.

The members spent several hours a day in prayer and worship and had many significant mystical experiences.<sup>58</sup> They emphasized the “born again” experience and encouraged being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” usually accompanied by dancing.

“Testimony” phenomena were common. The members fell into an ecstatic state. When they were restored, they claimed that they were caught up to heaven in a vision and received messages from God. These members were encouraged to share with the community what they had seen in the visions. Daniel Bays compares this practice to the Boxer's practice of possession.<sup>59</sup> However, *The Jesus Family* said that their members were ascending to heaven, while the Boxer claimed that gods came down from heaven and possessed their bodies. According to the New Testament, Paul was caught up to heaven, while the evil spirits possessed a person. Thus, the nature of mystical experiences among *The Jesus Family* may not be resonant with Bays' comparison.

Watchman Nee (1903–1972) established *The Little Flock*. Nee's theology and ministry were a response to his personal experiences in the twentieth-century Chinese and western context, with roots in both Christian mystical and revival traditions.

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<sup>56</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Bays, *New History*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> Bays, *New History*, 131–32.

<sup>59</sup> Bays, *New History*, 132.

Nee was from a Christian family, his paternal grandfather being a pastor of the Congregationalists and his mother from a Methodist background. At his birth, his mother promised to God to offer him for raising God's people for service. After attending Chinese traditional education for several years, Nee was sent to the schools operated by missionaries. He was dissatisfied with Christianity until an evangelistic meeting led by Dora Yu in 1920, when he accepted Jesus after being mystically convicted of his sin in prayer.

Nee was enthusiastic in evangelizing, getting his friends and classmates converted and participated in street evangelism and evangelistic meetings. He realized the inadequacy of his spiritual maturity during his study at Yu's Bible school. Under the influence of M. E. Barber, a freelance British missionary, he studied the holiness literature from the Keswick Movement and the Welsh Revival, which greatly influenced his teachings. Nee referred frequently to Andrew Murray, Austin Sparks, Jessie Penn-Lewis, Madame Guyon, and Nelson Darby.<sup>60</sup> Penn-Lewis's emphasis on the separation of spirit and soul based on Heb 4:12, her anthropological struggle, and her spiritual battle left distinctive marks on the trichotomous approach of Nee's anthropology.<sup>61</sup> Nee taught himself western theology, hermeneutics, spirituality, and other subjects, even though he

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<sup>60</sup> Kinnear, *Against the Tide*, 77; Lam, *Shuling Shenxue*, 26–28. Nee also studied the works and the life of F.B. Meyer, George Müller, C. H. Mackintosh, William Kelly, Charles Stanley, George Cutting, C. A. Coates, Hudson, Charles G. Finney, C. H. Spurgeon, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, John Knox, George Whitefield, and other church figures.

<sup>61</sup> One of the core critiques of Nee's trichotomous approach is that it is not biblical. The Bible does not say that a person consists of spirit, soul, and body, even though it mentions these three terms. Sometimes, spirit and soul refer to the same meaning. While Nee claimed that his approach was biblical psychology, such a claim was not based on an accurate exegesis. I agree that a comprehensive biblical exegesis does not support Nee's trichotomy. However, the Bible applies terms for the parts of a person, such as soul, spirit, mind, and body, to better explain its teachings. It does not intend to construct a holistic composition of a person, which Nee attempted to do, thus invokes critiques. I commend that Nee critically applied the terms for the parts of a person to interpreting some biblical teachings, which helps believers to have a better understanding of themselves and the ways to bear the cross and conform to God's will. I resonate with Nee that the transformation of a person's spirit (the relationship with God) could not bypass the regeneration of the mind, emotion, and will.

did not receive any formal theological training from western seminaries. He also found a way to integrate what he learnt into his system of faith and taught these ideas to others.

Nee not only interacted with western believers in China but also in England and the United States. In 1933, he visited the Plymouth Brethren believers and Austin Sparks in England, some Brethren believers in Vancouver, and some missionaries in the United States. When he travelled to Europe in 1938–39, he delivered a series of messages that were compiled into a book named *The Normal Christian Life*.

Through *The Normal Christian Life*, Nee presented to the westerners his thoughts on spirituality through the exposition of the texts of chapters 1 to 8 of Romans, with many appealing illustrations, personal accounts, and anecdotes. Using a language that connected to people's experience and rational thinking, Nee explained how the cross made the transformation possible in the devotees' life. He made it clear that the devotees had to know the cross, reckon the truth of God's revealed facts and promises, dedicate themselves to God, then they would be able to follow the Spirit. This book has had an enduring influence on the spiritual life of many people, including westerners.

Nee's spiritual theology focused on "the millenarian vision of the spiritual victory over the evils and the trial of the world through identification with Christ's death and, for those who thereby are the victors or 'overcomers,' to be with God and Christ in the timeless New Jerusalem."<sup>62</sup> Nee adopted the trichotomous approach to elaborate the mystery of the cross in *The Spiritual Man*, published at the age of twenty-five. This trichotomous approach assisted him in explaining how the power of the truth of the cross worked in the devotees so that they became spiritual persons. Through Nee's works, this

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<sup>62</sup> Bays, *New History*, 133.

trichotomous approach had a direct and indirect influence on around seventy percent of Chinese Christians.<sup>63</sup>

Nee's spiritual theology had several themes that were resonant with mystical theology. Nee watched over intellectual activity with intensive suspicion and caution.<sup>64</sup> He noted that Satan deceived regenerated believers by attacking their weakest point, which was their mind, through false teachings, prejudices, and narrow-minded theories.<sup>65</sup> Nee's attitude and belief were criticized as anti-intellectualism. Dongsheng Wu argues that Nee's position resonated with medieval mystical thought that mystical union was related to the stages of human knowing.<sup>66</sup> As McGinn notes, some mystical theologians separated the lower aspects of human intellectual activity from the ultimate loving union to prevent human discursive and conceptual thinking from the egotistical attempt of invading a realm where it could only do more harm than good.<sup>67</sup> Wu also related Nee's position to his lack of theological academic training and the influence of the theological and spiritual strands that "tended to place a more exclusive emphasis on the experiential encounter with the divine reality."<sup>68</sup>

However, Nee pointed out the auxiliary role of the mind, only after it had been renewed through the work of the cross, even though he did not assert like St. John of the Cross, the transcendence of knowledge in the union of God.<sup>69</sup> The regenerated mind

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<sup>63</sup> Lee, *Yonghuo Shangdi*, 309.

<sup>64</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 174.

<sup>65</sup> Roberts, *Watchman Nee*, 103.

<sup>66</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 173. Christian mysticism seeks to experience union with God that is an experiential, direct, non-abstract, unmediated, loving knowing of God.

<sup>67</sup> McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and *Unio Mystica*," 85. As quoted by Wu in *Understanding*, 173, 174. McGinn makes this notion when he comments on Thomas Gallus and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Thomas Gallus was a French theologian in the thirteenth century. His elaborate mystical schemata influenced *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous work of Christian mysticism in the fourteenth century.

<sup>68</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 106.

translated truth and interpreted intuition received from God.<sup>70</sup> However, Nee was cautious about the possibility of being puffed up by the mind in the process of acquiring knowledge. Thus, Nee believed that the exercise of the mind was indispensable for the spiritual believers; meanwhile, he acknowledged the challenge for carnal believers to be renewed.

Nee believed in direct experience from God, as demonstrated in his teaching on knowing God's Word through revelation. Nee fully acknowledged that the Bible as God's inspiration was completed and had full authority over believers. What he called "revelation" referred to the guidance of the Spirit in understanding the biblical truth, which was equivalent to "illumination" in the Westminster Confession and Calvin's works.<sup>71</sup> It was an experiential conviction of the teachings of the Bible when believers encountered God through voice or vision. Through illumination, God's revelation through the Bible became alive to believers.<sup>72</sup> Ka-lun Leung points out that Nee wanted to show that the understanding of the Scripture should move beyond relying on the commentaries. He criticizes that Nee was arrogant to make such a claim.<sup>73</sup> However, according to evangelical teaching, the sinful mind cannot fully grasp God's truth, which implies that the interpretation of God's Word merely with rational methodology cannot guarantee the "objective" knowing of God's Word. Meanwhile, Nee emphasized the necessity of preparation of the spiritual life for receiving illumination. The sanctified spirit was ready to experience God when he revealed himself. Nee's teaching paralleled

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<sup>70</sup> Nee, *Spiritual Man*, 3.79.

<sup>71</sup> Yates, "How Does God Speak," 104–105, 107.

<sup>72</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 90. Wu explains that Nee used the term *revelation* to stress the divine role of the experience or the fact of what happens and the term *illumination* to stress the human role of the same event or the effect of what happens.

<sup>73</sup> Leung, *Ni Tuosheng*, 13.

some mystical perspectives that the experiences of illumination became fecund after the stage of purgation.

Nee had many mystical experiences, but he never upheld them to be a sign of divine privilege and spiritual maturity.<sup>74</sup> During the night when he accepted Jesus as his saviour, he was praying and felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of his sins at the same time felt embraced by Jesus' arm in his love.<sup>75</sup> He could not resolve such an experience with rational cognition.

Nee also experienced the miraculous healing of tuberculosis. He said in his testimony that he received God's message when he was asking God why he was dying in his twenties. The message was "live by faith (Rom 1:17), stand firm by faith (2 Cor 1:24), and walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7)." He had been confined to bed because of tuberculosis for a few months. However, this message from God gave him the strength to rise, stand, and walk downstairs, and then went to a co-worker's home. He was healed.<sup>76</sup>

Nee also had the experience of illumination. He could not understand the phrase "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ" in Rom 6:11. How could he "count" himself dead to sin? Nee prayed for understanding for a few months. One morning, while he meditated on Romans, he suddenly "saw" that God had already made him dead in Christ when Jesus died one thousand nine hundred years ago. He claimed that the Lord "opened his eyes" to see that he had already died to sin when Jesus died. It

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<sup>74</sup> Nee, *Spiritual Man*, 1:12. Nee's disposition on this aspect of mystical experiences paralleled many Christian mystics. See Kristo, "Interpretation of Religious Experience," 38.

<sup>75</sup> Chan, *Jianshi*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> It was recorded as the second testimony that Nee made in public about the work of the Holy Spirit on him. See Nee, "Di'erci Jianzhen," para. 32–36.

was not that he was going to die in Christ in the future. He acquired the spiritual insight through this experience of illumination that sin no longer had power over him.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, there were several occasions that God told him in detail about the things that were going to happen. He was in doubt at first, but when the things turned out the detailed ways that he was foretold, he started to understand that God chose this way to communicate with him and tested his discernment and obedience.<sup>78</sup>

Nee was cautious about spiritual experience and revivalism. When he was inspired by the work of the Spirit in the Pentecostal movement, he led the little flocks to participate in this surge of revivalism.<sup>79</sup> Whereas as soon as he discerned that the mystical experience occurring among the little flocks was not in accordance with the Bible, he called a stop to the participation right away.

Regarding the ministry, Nee felt that his calling from God was to build up the church instead of getting people converted through all kinds of evangelistic meetings. Nee had been inspired by the revivalism that was initiated by foreign missionaries. However, Nee was wary that he would be entangled in the foreigners' politics and by their pursuit of the number of converts. Therefore, he sought revival through establishing the churches that built up believers in the truth of the Word of God and pursued spiritual maturity. These churches were capable of discipling the believers who could advance the gospel instead of being content with shallow spirituality and relying heavily on paid ministers. Nee chose to follow the model of the primitive churches in the New Testament.

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<sup>77</sup> Kinner, "Zhongliudizhu," 96–98.

<sup>78</sup> See Nee, "Di'erci Jianzhen," para. 6–9.

<sup>79</sup> A Pentecostal revivalism swept across north and central China in the 1930s. It attracted many churches, missionaries, and pastors, both western and Chinese, who participated in it. However, some dropped out later. Meanwhile, many were suspicious about psychological experiences amid this revival movement. See Bays, *New History*, 134–35.

He understood that the church should be organized by its locality instead of being divided by denominations. He further believed that the Spirit would lead believers to join Christ's church. Thus, he initiated the little flock movement in 1927 and built one church in one local city. In one church, he also organized many groups called "families" that gathered regularly at home and facilitated local fellowship, caring, and evangelism.

Regarding spiritual practices, Nee and the little flocks expressed their desire to discern, receive, and follow God's will through fervent prayer, diligent bible study, active evangelism and mission, exercising faith, cooperative life, and other practices.<sup>80</sup> The transformation of life by God's Word and the Spirit prepared the devotees for fulfilling God's will. Nee's concept of union with God emphasized the union of the human will with God's will. Those who followed Nee's spiritual path accepted the historical reality that they had died to sin when Jesus died on the cross. Thus, they not only actively sought God's will but also actively exercised their will to resist evil. Furthermore, they submitted their will to God's will without any reservation, that was, at the price of enduring all kinds of suffering.

Nee was also influential through his hymns. At first, he attempted to write the lyrics by practicing the Chinese traditional poetic style. Exhorted by Barber, he repented and waited upon the Spirit, allowing the lyrics to flow out of his spiritual life and the move of the Spirit.<sup>81</sup> Some hymns praised the love of the Lord shown through his sacrifice at the cross, such as "Hast Thou No Scar." Some hymns were about God's work on transforming the believers through the cross, such as "Olives that Have Known No Pressure" and "Let Me Love and Not Be Respected." Nee also taught that the believers

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<sup>80</sup> The strong corporate life at the local church level helped the little flocks to endure severe trials. See Chan, *Grassroots*, 186.

<sup>81</sup> Sze, *Siren yu Sige*, chapter 29.

had to know Jesus through the indwelling Spirit in hymns like “Oh, Jesus, Lord, When, Thou on Earth.” He exhorted the union with the Lord through hymns such as “Thou Hast Said Thou Art the Vine.”

The little flock movement was city-centered, expanding to rural areas, northwest of China, and overseas through evangelism and missional church planting. Nee did not travel a lot to exercise his influence over these churches. He gathered the co-workers or church leaders in some places for training, retreat, and “overcomer” conferences. Moreover, his speeches and training materials were transcribed for publication. Some were translated into English and other languages. His influence was not limited to Chinese people but also throughout the world.

Mingdao Wang (1900–1991) was known for his public resistance to the communist government in the 1950s.<sup>82</sup> He held on to the truth of Christ, emphasizing the necessity of confession, forgiveness of sin, and regeneration, regardless of the restrictions put on him. He set up an independent church in Beijing, called “The Christian Tabernacle.” He was an eloquent speaker and travelled around China, holding revival meetings and evangelistic meetings in the evangelical churches. Wang opposed liberal theology, the social gospel, and the Church of Christ in China, and criticized the negative influence of the work of foreign missionaries. He made his voice heard not only through sermons but also through his publication *The Spiritual Food Quarterly*.

The indigenous movement not only included these indigenous churches but also extended to rituals such as weddings and funerals by renovating them according to the biblical teachings. However, some aspects of Chinese traditions were retained, such as

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<sup>82</sup> Bays, *New History*, 122–23. Wang was in prison because of his protest against the Three-self Patriotic Movement and was released in 1979.

bowing to parents at weddings to show respect and honour.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, some leaders tried to fuse Confucian concepts into Christian theology. Leichuan Wu, a Confucian scholar wrote prolifically in an attempt to present to his Confucian counterparts Christian values such as love and prayer with self-cultivation.<sup>84</sup>

Along with the growth of the indigenous movement, many foreign missionaries returned home in the 1930s because the hospitals and schools run by them fell short of financial support due to the depression and wars. However, evangelicals such as the China Inland Mission, who focused on evangelism, continued to experience growth.<sup>85</sup> The nation-wide or local evangelistic movements targeting particular groups and regions of people bloomed with the support of indigenous fundraising and intercession.<sup>86</sup>

Chinese evangelical spirituality demonstrated its distinctive characteristics, along with the development of indigenization. Those Chinese evangelicals, who did not follow various denominations, held the apostolic church in the New Testament as their model. Thus, other than fervent prayer, one prominent characteristic of their spirituality was seeking and experiencing the leading of the Holy Spirit through God's words. However, whether they put more weight on the Spirit or the Word varied. The Pentecostal atmosphere influenced some groups such as *The Jesus Family*. They earnestly pursued the spiritual gifts and direct guidance from the Holy Spirit through the gifts of prophecy. While some groups, such as *The Little Flock*, emphasized understanding and knowing the Word through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They were transformed by the Word, which was the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Word became alive in the

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<sup>83</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> West, "Christianity and Nationalism," 226–46.

<sup>85</sup> Bays, *New History*, 122–23.

<sup>86</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 6.

believers through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, some groups influenced by the evangelical theologian Yuming Jia, who would be introduced in detail in the next section, focused more on a doctrinal and rational understanding of the Word. At the same time, they believed in the work of the Holy Spirit in applying reason to the interpretation of the Scripture, which Jia called spiritual reasoning.<sup>87</sup>

Another characteristic was that some evangelicals, like Nee, called for spiritual discernment because they realized that some mystical or miraculous experiences were not from the Holy Spirit. They were not blinded by the appearance of supernatural experience. Instead, they applied the truth of the Bible to discern whether the experience that they encountered was authentic. Both the leaders and the corporate communities played important roles in discernment and called for actions when they had to respond to the source of these experiences.

Hymns still played an important role in the evangelicals' spiritual life. The popular hymns were indigenous, life-relevant, and spirit elevating. Zichen Zhao (1888–1979), a theologian and hymnist, composed and published fifty-four hymns for peasants in the rural areas in 1933. These hymns were relevant to rural life. However, they aimed at exhortation so that the peasants could appreciate the poems and praise God with elevated spirituality. For example, the Hymn of the Holy Spirit expressed the desire for the presence of the Holy Spirit that “shined in my heart like the sunshine, teaching me to adore God because God’s love was broader than the ocean.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Yu, “Jia Yuming,” para. 9–10.

<sup>88</sup> It is my translation. For the Chinese lyrics, see Yu, “Shengshi Zhongguohua,” para. 12. Zhao’s hymns for peasants were influential among the evangelicals. Zhao translated western hymns into Chinese and compiled a hymnal for Chinese churches in 1931. However, he was liberal in the early years of his Christian life. He understood Jesus from the Confucian moral perspective instead of the one in the New Testament. Nevertheless, after his six-month imprisonment by the Japanese army on the day of the Pearl

#### 4. 1937–1949<sup>89</sup>

The indigenous movement continued after the breakout of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This period had witnessed the indigenization of theological education. Chonggui Chen (1884–1964), the former president of Chongqing Theological Seminary, had demonstrated the struggle of Chinese leaders for autonomy from westerners.<sup>90</sup> Another conservative evangelical theologian, Yuming Jia (1880–1964), established Chinese Christian Spiritual Formation College. Jia became the president of Jinling Women Seminary since 1930. When Jinling Women Seminary and Jinling Seminary started joint-operations in 1936, Jia resigned because he did not want to work under the dominance of the liberals in Jinling Seminary. He established an exclusively Chinese Seminary.<sup>91</sup>

The establishment of the Chinese Christian Spiritual Formation College manifested the perception of Jia and many other Chinese evangelical leaders toward theological education. They perceived that they should take a different approach to

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Harbor attack, he began to accept Jesus' salvific power for sin instead of his moral example for the renovation of social structure.

<sup>89</sup> Following the interest of western missionaries, the study of Christianity in China before 1949 focuses on the following topics: "the conflict and blending of Christian doctrines and Chinese traditional culture, especially of the intrinsic religious concepts and customs; the influence on Chinese society by the dissemination of Christianity; the relationship between the undertakings of Christianity in China and Chinese modernization; the self-adjustment of Christianity and how to be accepted by the Chinese society." Kaiyuan Zhang comments that the research on Protestantism before 1949 had low academic value because most of the researchers were within the church even though they understood the Christian doctrine and its evolution. See Zhang, "Chinese Perspective," 31. The historical research done from 1949 to 1978 includes Senfu Yang's *中國基督教史* (*Zhongguo Jidujiaoshi, History of Christianity in China*), Zhixin Wang's *中國基督教史綱* (*Zhongguo Jidujiao Shigang, Chinese Christianity History*), and Zhiping Lin's *基督教在中國之傳播與近代中國* (*Jidujiao zai Zhongguo zhi Chuanbo yu Jindai Zhongguo, The Dissemination of Christianity in China and Modern China*). In the 1980s, the works include Changsheng Gu's *傳教士與近代中國* (*Chuanjiaoshi yu Jindai Zhongguo, Missionaries and Modern China*) and *從馬禮遜到司徒雷登：來華新教傳教士評傳* (*Cong Malixun dao Situleideng: Laihua Xinjiao Chuanjiaoshi Pingzhuan, From Morrison to Stuart: Critical Biographies of Protestant missionaries in China*). In the 1990s, the researches include Weizheng Zhu's *基督教與近代中國文化* (*Jidujiao yu Jindai Wenhua, Christianity and Modern Culture*), Yuezhi Xiong's *西學東漸與晚清社會* (*Xixue Dongjian yu Wan Qing Shehui, Western Knowledge's Dissemination into China and Late Qing Society*). Zhang implies that academic research can attain objectivity and scientific quality only if it avoids the "leftist" influence, which is the influence of those who are in favour of Christianity.

<sup>90</sup> Bays, *New History*, 97–99, 138–40.

<sup>91</sup> Luo, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Shi*, 492.

theological training from that of the seminaries led by western missionaries. The focus on doctrinal training by the latter could not meet the needs of Chinese evangelicals. They demanded that they should emphasize both spirituality and doctrines.<sup>92</sup>

On the one hand, Jia was a well-known Chinese evangelical theologian and biblical interpreter. He was from the Reformed background. In 1915, he accepted a teaching position at Jinling Seminary and started his journey as a theological educator, after he had been a pastor for Presbyterian churches for twelve years. He had been influenced by John Nelson Darby and accepted the perception of dispensational premillennialism. His theological works included *Shen Dao Xue* (The Truth of God), *Wangquan Jiufa* (Sufficient Way of Salvation), *Jiao Mu Xue* (Pastoral Theology), and *Xuan Dao Xue* (Missional Theology). He also wrote commentaries on the sixty-six books of the Bible.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, Jia pursued spiritual maturity through devotional practices. He had formed the habit of spiritual practice since his childhood. He not only encouraged earnest prayer but also exhorted diligently reading the Scripture. He instructed his students to read a pericope twenty times before turning to commentaries, and they needed to finish reading the whole Bible at least once each semester.<sup>94</sup> Having the executive authority of the college, Jia provided the students with the opportunity to pursue abundant spiritual blessings and sound doctrinal truth for the power to lead people to Christ.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Wang, "Lingxiu", 108.

<sup>93</sup> Luo, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Shi*, 492.

<sup>94</sup> Wang, "Lingxiu," 116.

<sup>95</sup> Many seminaries also claimed in their constitution that they valued the formation of the students' spiritual life. However, the executive boards that dominated the operation of the educational system failed to fulfill their claim.

The college anthem manifested its spirit. The anthem claimed that the Lord established and led the college, thus had its foundation in the Lord. The students should prioritize their spiritual growth and keep their faith orthodox. They formed a community of close fellowship and learned from Elijah's hiddenness at the brook of Cherith and Zarephath for holiness. The aim of these practices was for knowing the Truth and preaching the gospel.<sup>96</sup>

Chinese evangelicals had more opportunities to take over the leadership and responsibilities during the eight-year Sino-Japanese War. Western missionaries left for the concern of safety, especially after the Allied Powers joined the war against Japan in 1941.<sup>97</sup> When the Japanese attempted to control Chinese Protestants in northern China by establishing the North China Church of Christ League, some Protestant churches joined it while some such as Mingdao Wang resisted it with courage. Thus, it created the controversy of "resistance" and "collaboration" concerning Japanese control.<sup>98</sup> Because the Japanese exercised their control through Japanese Christian leaders, Chinese Christianity had to face the challenge aroused by the attempted manipulation of imperialism or political authorities.<sup>99</sup>

The independent churches continued to grow, including *The True Jesus Church*, *The Jesus Family*, and *The Little Flock*, with the end-time preaching and rampant millenarianism. They made an effort to call people to repent for their sins and be regenerated through Jesus instead of advocating social work like tending soldiers or

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<sup>96</sup> Wang, "Lingxiu," 113–14.

<sup>97</sup> After the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, many western missionaries in the occupied regions were put in prisons. The financial support from overseas was cut off. Many Christian schools had to move to the west of China. Christian publications were cut down. The Bible Society had to print Bibles in India. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Bays, *New History*, 142–45.

<sup>99</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 7.

relieving famine or disease.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, new missional opportunities had been explored in the north-west and south-west of China. *The China Inland Mission* organized *Chinese Back-to-Jerusalem Evangelistic Band*, dedicated to Xingjiang mission fields. Christian refugees created ministries to the minority peoples in Guizhou and Yunnan.<sup>101</sup>

After the Sino-Japanese War, the churches in China were expecting a time of restoration.<sup>102</sup> Foreign missionaries came back, facing their Chinese colleagues who had taken the leadership positions for around eight years. Tension arose over who was going to be in charge.

Meanwhile, a new movement among the evangelical students emerged when the colleges, which were forced into exile to the west during the war, were moved back to eastern cities. China Inter-Varsity cooperating with the China Inland Mission evangelized to the students and influenced them greatly.<sup>103</sup>

When the three and a half year civil war between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) approached the end, and it became clear that the CCP and atheism were going to control China, evangelicals had to decide whether to stay or to leave.<sup>104</sup> Many leaders such as Nee chose to stay, because of their pastoral and evangelistic calling and responsibility in China. They had to respond to the new regime and negotiated free space for their ministries. They adopted the following strategy to cope with an uncertain future: making more effort in training Chinese Christian leaders, establishing more churches in the rural areas, promoting the printing

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<sup>100</sup> Bays, *New History*, 145–46. Many Protestants actively participated in providing accommodation and career training for the refugees. They also sent volunteers to the battle frontier to provide care for the casualties. Moreover, they participated in fund-raising for supporting Chinese soldiers. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 8–9.

<sup>101</sup> Bays, *New History*, 146.

<sup>102</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Bays, *New History*, 148–49.

<sup>104</sup> Bays, *New History*, 149.

and selling of the Bible and the Christian books, promoting house worship, transferring church liquid property and files to Hong Kong, and registering church property.<sup>105</sup>

In summary, Chinese Christians stressed their role in building up indigenous Chinese churches without avoiding the influence of western Christianity. However, they claimed that the Spirit led them to seek autonomy. The autonomy achieved in theological training provided more people with guidance for spiritual practices that prepared them for maturity. However, the claim that following the leading of the Holy Spirit had various implications. It could be the leading of the Holy Spirit through the regular ritual of the churches. It could also be the direct experience of God as in revivalism. Every church or community had its theological tradition to interpret the work of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, a challenge in the realm of Chinese evangelical spirituality was that spiritual practices had no clear and mature regulation like the Benedictines. Without a strong foundation of spiritual theology and regulation, Chinese evangelicals relied heavily on spiritual experience that tended to be subjective and superstitious.

## 5. 1949–1976

Along with the establishment of the People's Republic of China, foreign missionaries were expelled from China.<sup>106</sup> The departure of western missionaries was accelerated by the involvement of the Chinese army and the US army in the Korean War. The financial resources for Chinese Christians were cut dramatically when the US government froze all Chinese assets in the US, and the Chinese government retaliated by freezing all the

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<sup>105</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 9.

<sup>106</sup> By 1949, the number of Chinese Protestants had reached around one million. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 1.

American assets in China.<sup>107</sup> Chinese Christianity started a new period of development without western support.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, Chinese Christians had to develop under a government that was directed by the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>109</sup>

Showing the new government their determination to expel imperialism and contribute to the good of Chinese people, Chinese evangelicals demonstrated their goodwill to support the government for building the country.<sup>110</sup> However, they wanted to make sure that the patriotic policy adopted by the CCP would not restrict their right to the freedom of religious belief and compromise their faith.<sup>111</sup> The policy was under the labels “three-self” and “patriotism.” Both were not created by the CCP. “Three-self” principles originated in the mission field, supported by Chinese Christians, and launched by Chinese “progressive” Christian leader Yaozong Wu.<sup>112</sup> Patriotism was a natural part of Chinese culture. Quite a few Protestants were in favour of the atmosphere of the new regime at the beginning of the 1950s. The “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” (hereafter TSPM) was officially established in 1954, with some evangelical leaders such as Dianying Jing, the founder of *The Jesus Family*, and Chonggui Chen, an evangelical theological educator,

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<sup>107</sup> Bay, *New History*, 163.

<sup>108</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 9.

<sup>109</sup> Chinese socialism regards religions as a temporary social phenomenon that are doomed to eventual extinction. During the development of the Chinese socialist society, some politicians advocate tight control over religions to diminish their social influence and annihilate them intentionally. Others promote policies to encourage the religions to align with the CCP for the development of the country. Thus, they can contribute to the greatest good of society before they become extinct. Generally, the government adopts the educational approach to persuade religious people to give up their practice of religion, meanwhile uphold their patriotism. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 23.

<sup>110</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 23.

<sup>111</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 25.

<sup>112</sup> Chinese progressive Christians emphasized social concern, thus made a major effort on running schools, hospitals, YM/WCA. They tended to seek compliance with the political forces.

on the board of vice-chairpersons.<sup>113</sup> However, the TSPM was under the direct supervision of the Religious Affairs Bureau, which was under the CCP's United Front Work Department.<sup>114</sup> The detailed regulations based on the principles inevitably deviated from what many evangelicals had expected.<sup>115</sup> Many evangelicals realized that their faith had been compromised, and the CCP had put their authority over the authority of the Bible and God.<sup>116</sup> They resisted the TSPM and paid the price for their faith.<sup>117</sup>

Nee was prosecuted as an economic criminal and a corrupt capitalist by the newly established socialist government. During the Sino-Japanese War, the economic depression challenged the operation of the churches. Nee decided to take up the role of the president of a family pharmaceutical company to acquire the financial resources to support the churches. He resigned from this position of president in 1945 when more and more leaders of the church requested him to prioritize the role as the leader of the church.

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<sup>113</sup> Three-Self Patriotic Movement is a movement holding three principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. The purpose of the movement is to remove foreign influences from the churches and assure the government that these churches would be patriotic. Some leaders of the TSPM are invited to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference to provide their suggestions for the development of the country as the non-CCPs. During the first conference, Wu claimed that since the constitution had affirmed the freedom of religious rights, Christians would cherish this freedom, but they definitely would not abuse this freedom. Wu perceived that the goal of Chinese churches was to eliminate the corrupted tradition in Chinese Christianity and its connection with feudalism and capitalist forces. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> Bay, *New History*, 163–64. Through the United Front Work Department, the CCP supervises and directs the relationship with other groups, including religious and political groups. See Wickeri, *Common Ground*, 46.

<sup>115</sup> From the communist government's perceptive, Christianity belongs to the realm of idealism, which is in tension or even in conflict with the communist government's materialist perspective. The CCP may encourage Chinese people who uphold these perspectives to cooperate and involve in social and political activities. However, because the CCP is the sole ruler, the cooperation is nevertheless understood, advocated, and operated from the materialist's perspective. See Yao, *Jidujiao*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 24. For example, under the guideline provided by the TSPM, supporting the Soviet Union (former) became one of the Christian duties. Furthermore, the preaching tended to proclaim justification by works, which were ethical works appraised by the government that supported the governing of the CCP.

<sup>117</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 92. The foci of the resistance were not related to the political standing but compromise of the faith. For example, the first chairperson of the TSPM, Yaozong Wu, did not believe in Jesus' virgin birth, resurrection, ascension, and second coming and aimed at building an earthly kingdom of Christianity.

Nee spent the rest of his life in prison and labour camps because of accusations from the government. Some members of *The Little Flock* cooperated with the TSPM and joined the churches affiliated with the TSPM. While many members resisted, some moved abroad.<sup>118</sup> Through them, Nee's spiritual influence spread to Chinese churches outside *The Little Flock* even though he remained silent in the last twenty years of his life.

Jing, the founder of *The Jesus Family*, and Isaac Wei, the son of Paul Wei, the leader of *The True Jesus Church*, were removed from their leadership in the mid-1950s.<sup>119</sup> Mingdao Wang criticized the modernist theology of the TSPM leaders in 1955 and was put in prison. After one year in jail, Wang signed a confession to retrieve his opposition against the TSPM and was released. However, he relented his confession and refused to join the TSPM.<sup>120</sup> He was put in jail again until 1980. Wang became the prototype of those who resisted the policy of the TSPM that might compromise the gospel. Chonggui Chen was one of the first vice-chairpersons of the TSPM.<sup>121</sup> In 1957, he lost his position and was sent to a labour camp because he criticized the harsh attitude of the CCP toward many religious believers and leaders. Starting from the beginning, the TSPM worked hard to bring Protestants to "unity," including the churches, organizations, and theological training institutions. Its purpose was not to promote the gospel but to support the CCP under the name of patriotism. Without a doubt, because of the left-wing political governing and ten-year cultural revolution, the development of Chinese

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<sup>118</sup> Bay, *New History*, 165.

<sup>119</sup> Bay, *New History*, 165. It became quite clear in the mid-1950s that the CCP intended to eliminate those who had authority over the influential groups and disobeyed the rule of the CCP, even though they did not oppose the CCP and the TSPM and had no affiliation with the foreigners.

<sup>120</sup> Bay, *New History*, 166.

<sup>121</sup> The presence of some prominent evangelical leaders, including Chen, gave the impression to the conservative Chinese Christians that the TSPM was an authentic Christian organization.

evangelicalism had been impeded, and the religious activity had been halted.<sup>122</sup> From 1958 to 1976, many Christian leaders and believers ended up in the labour camps. Most churches were closed.

However, evangelicals continued their gospel work without the support of western missionaries or prominent Chinese leaders.<sup>123</sup> They were shepherded through various channels and leaders.<sup>124</sup> House churches without ordained pastors grew outside the radar of the CCP and the public surveillance.<sup>125</sup> The evangelistic messages passed down from Nee, Wang, and the China Inland Mission were preached by these house church leaders and led many people to Christ. Even prisons and labour camps became important places where the gospel spread.<sup>126</sup> At the period of political chaos and natural disaster, the millenarian messages expecting the imminent coming of Christ again attracted and comforted many people. Bays notes, “many home churches at this time were in effect shaped by [the] True Jesus input or by followers of Nee.”<sup>127</sup>

When the public voice as an expression of faith was turned silent, the inner voices turned loud. Chinese evangelicals during this period of persecution, prayed even more earnestly for the strength to sustain their faith in Jesus. As a report says, some persecutors hung a heavy board over a leader’s neck with very thin iron wire. Because of the weight, thin wire cut into the muscle of his neck and caused bleeding. He sustained the pain because of experiencing the presence of God through earnest prayer.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 11.

<sup>123</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 27.

<sup>124</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 2. In some cities such as Fuzhou and Wenzhou, large services were held for Christians from the mid-1970s, regardless of denominational backgrounds.

<sup>125</sup> Brown, *Christianity*, 127–28. A few Christians met at a believer’s home to read the Bible, pray, and share with or without lay preachers. The groups would grow and become several small groups.

<sup>126</sup> Bay, *New History*, 176.

<sup>127</sup> Bay, *New History*, 186.

<sup>128</sup> Zhao and Zhuang, *Fazhanshi*, 206–207.

Because of the persecution, Chinese evangelicals began to understand the meaning of enduring the cross like Jesus. They realized that the cross not only stood for the crucifixion of sinful desire but also for suffering. They were resonant with Madam Guyon's interpretation of the cross. Suffering and hardship were the crosses that the disciples of Jesus should carry.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, Chinese evangelicals followed Paul's spiritual experience to suffer for Christ (Phil 1:29). They began to understand that suffering for Christ was a spiritual privilege for his followers. It was in the moment of painful experience that they felt that they stood beside Jesus at his crucifixion. Once they experienced the spiritual reality of union with Christ through suffering, they were set free from the domination of persecution. They learned that suffering united the spiritual experience of crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>130</sup> In a word, through shameful suffering, they experienced Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Moreover, suffering put their faith to the test and compelled them to learn to forgive. Ultimately, suffering purified the community and believers' spirituality that stored the power for revival. Suffering became a distinct spiritual motif inherited by contemporary Chinese evangelicals under the CCP regime.

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<sup>129</sup> Many contemporary Chinese believers cannot understand how some kinds of hardship can become the cross that Jesus demands his disciples to carry every day; for example, the bad temper of a husband is the cross for his wife. According to the gospels, the purpose of carrying the cross is to deny oneself and follow Jesus every day (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), not only amidst suffering but also at the time of pleasure. For Paul, the cross connotes that he died to sin and the world and live to God (Rom 6:6, 8; Gal 2:20, 6:14).

<sup>130</sup> Zhao and Zhuang, *Fazhanshi*, xxvii.

## 6. 1978–2018

With the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the beginning of economic open policy in 1978, Chinese Christianity began to restore its regular and public religious life.<sup>131</sup> Xiaoping Deng directed the national policy of development to focus on economic growth. The government did not micro-control the operation of the economic and religious system. It exercised its control through policies and the strategic operation of state-owned industries. Privately-owned property and business were no longer perceived as evidence of capitalism. The Central Committee of the CCP issued Document Nineteen in 1982, called “the Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during our Country’s Socialist Period.”<sup>132</sup> Religion was a reality of socialism, and education and ideological maturation instead of coerced suppression would eventually eliminate it. “Normal religious activities” were sanctioned.<sup>133</sup>

A new organization, the China Christian Council (hereafter CCC), was established in 1980, focusing on the development of pastoral and congregational nurture

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<sup>131</sup> The Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966 and ended in 1976. The leftist planned this movement to secure Mao’s authority by educating those who tended to have different voices. However, it progressed to suppress any people who were suspicious of disagreement with Mao, including writers, artists, and religious people. See Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter*, 288.

<sup>132</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 48–53. The Article Thirty-six in the Constitution drafted in 1982 says, the citizens of the PRC have the right to the freedom of religious belief; no department of government, no organization, and no one is allowed to force any citizen to believe or not to believe in any religion, and no citizen should be discriminated because of his or her religious belief; the government protects normal religious activities and does not allow anyone to abuse religion for counter-revolutionary activities or disrupting social order, causing mass health hazard, and disturbing the education system of the nation; religion should not be manipulated by foreign countries. This regulation also considers praying for conception and rain, exorcism, and healing as superstitions that should be eliminated. Document Nineteen says, normal religious activities should be held in places approved by patriotic religious organizations designated by the CCP and the government departments; for those meeting in homes for worship services, the religious organizations should persuade them to make more appropriate arrangements instead of rigidly enforcing the shut down of the meetings; religious propagation outside the approved buildings and to young people under eighteen-year-old is forbidden. Issued in 1991, Document Six stresses against foreign infiltration through any religious activities and affirms a strict implementation of Article Thirty-six that all the house churches that refuse to register with the TSPM are illegal and should be shut down. See Cheng, “House Church,” 25.

<sup>133</sup> Bay, *New History*, 190.

and spiritual development. The CCC also supervised and developed the relationship of Chinese Christianity with overseas Christianity.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, it was different from the TSPM that focused on political issues. It buffered the relationship between the churches and the CCP, thus encouraged some churches to register under the TSPM.<sup>135</sup> From 1980 until 1997, Guangxun Ding (1915–2012) was appointed the chairperson and the president of both the CCC and the TSPM and honorary chairperson from 1997 to 2007 when he retired.<sup>136</sup>

In such a context, most Chinese evangelicals were from house churches and independent churches that did not put themselves in the system of the CCC and the TSPM. Some leaders and believers who were struggling in the government-sanctioned churches, that were the three-self churches registered under the TSPM, claimed to be evangelicals, distinguishing themselves from modernists or liberals. However, they needed to be shrewd in dealing with the TSPM and the CCP. They learned from the experience that the CCP had the ultimate authority to determine what were the “normal religious activities” protected by Document Nineteen.

Chinese evangelicals were recovering from the painful experience from 1950 to 1978. They exercised love and forgiveness toward those “Christians” who betrayed them and put them in prisons and labour camps.<sup>137</sup> They also had to weigh the authenticity of re-accepting into the community those who had recanted their faith during the persecution and restoring some of them to leadership positions.

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<sup>134</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 79. Billy Graham was invited to China in 1989.

<sup>135</sup> Bay, *New History*, 189.

<sup>136</sup> Yao, *Jidujiao*, 11–12. Ding’s theology promoted the sinicization of Christianity for the socialist development. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 84.

<sup>137</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 22.

When Chinese evangelicals spread the gospel right after the restoration of the right of religious belief, they bore fruits first among the people in the rural areas. The most common people in rural areas were farmers. During the Cultural Revolution, some involved in prosecuting and denouncing those who owned lands, properties, and business, had a connection with foreigners, exercised influences among Christians or other religious people, or had advanced education. Many under persecution were rehabilitated. However, the broken relationship was waiting to be restored. Common farmers with little education were enduring the life challenge to raise crops, herds, and families with barely enough resources. The gospel attracted many families, who were converted to Christ. The process of many conversion experiences started with healing miracles. However, with little theological training and guidance, believers were immature in dealing with local popular religious beliefs. Many people syncretized Christian beliefs with the practices of the popular cults, thus creating many heresies or cults.<sup>138</sup> These heresies or cults, in turn, came round the evangelical churches and harassed them.<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, what was most urgent for Chinese evangelicals was calling and nurturing the leaders to pastor the increasing number of believers.<sup>140</sup> They needed to grow in knowing the Bible, doctrine, and spirituality. Thus, they could sharpen their theological and spiritual discernment and uphold their evangelical identity. However, the seminaries operated by the TSPM were not the evangelical's option.

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<sup>138</sup> Bay, *New History*, 193. Bays observes that “some of the inherent similarities between Protestant radical millenarianism and the eschatological features of traditional Chinese popular religion became visible and interactive.”

<sup>139</sup> Bay, *New History*, 195. The evangelicals abroad realize that the situation of the house churches in China is quite chaotic. Some radical sectarian groups such as the Weepers and the Shouters may regard themselves as evangelicals. However, it is very easy for their members to go astray and become heresies. For example, one leader from the Shouters claimed himself to be the established king and formed a group called “the Established King” sect. He was executed in 1995 after confessed his sexual crime under the disguise of a religious leader.

<sup>140</sup> Bay, *New History*, 191.

Understanding the situation and the needs of Chinese evangelicals, many foreign missionaries entered China, taking advantage of the policy of reform and opening.<sup>141</sup> They taught at the underground seminaries for house churches. Many Chinese evangelicals abroad, including those who retreated abroad around 1950, came to China, spread the gospel, and built churches. They brought with them the theological or gospel tools.<sup>142</sup> Most of these activities were illegal according to religious regulations.

With the rapid economic growth, more Chinese went abroad and more foreigners came to China. Many Chinese got to know Christians with higher education and from a scientific background. Some Chinese intellectuals started to look at Christianity as part of western culture instead of seeing it as a superstitious practice. They had rationalized that the reason for the distinctions between western Christianity and Chinese Christianity was rooted in Chinese superstition until they came to know the truth of the gospel and the person of Jesus. Chinese evangelicals started to evangelize in the cities as well, even among the university students, researchers, and professors. As a result, more and more middle class persons with higher education from the cities joined the churches.

These new evangelicals tried various ways to get theological training. They grasped opportunities to enroll in theological education when they travelled abroad. They found ways to access internet resources. They acquired theological degrees through online training. After the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, some evangelical leaders

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<sup>141</sup> The foreigners were welcomed to China for legal purposes such as investment, tourism, and study. The visitation for the legal religious purpose had to be approved by the CCC and the Religious Affairs Bureau.

<sup>142</sup> Bay, *New History*, 195.

could acquire theological education at the seminaries in Hong Kong, with the approval of the CCC.<sup>143</sup>

Those who were outside the TSPM system realized that they needed to build up their theological and spiritual identity and operational structure to advance the gospel.<sup>144</sup> The non-government-sanctioned churches such as *The Fangcheng Fellowship* and *The Chinese Gospel Fellowship* had their network of evangelism and church life all over the country, involving millions of believers. Some independent house churches such as *Beijing Zion Church* had public worship and formal operations like the government-sanctioned churches.

Chinese evangelicals today are learning to evangelize and serve the rural people in the city. The rural people come to the cities for work. Often they have left their land and work as labourers in the factories. The population of this group has reached 200 million. Without permanent resident rights in the city, their children cannot enroll in the schools where they work. Thus, many of them leave their children in their hometowns. Evangelicals not only care for their spiritual needs but also their material and psychological needs to preach the gospel to these people. Some mission organizations and local churches cooperate and reach out to these children left behind by their parents, helping them with their study and providing spiritual and parental guidance. Some

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<sup>143</sup> The local Religious Affairs Bureau could approve some pastors from the three-self churches to enrol in the degree programs of some seminaries in Hong Kong. However, the number was limited. Other pastors or leaders, especially those not from the government-sanctioned churches, needed to find their ways to Hong Kong for theological education. The evangelicals in Hong Kong actively imported evangelical publications to China, broadcast gospel programs to China, trained Mainland Chinese evangelicals, and provided financial support. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 4.

<sup>144</sup> The government-sanctioned churches adopt a formal structure of operation and administration. Even though *The True Jesus Church*, *The Little Flock*, and *The Seventh Day Adventists* adopt a denominational approach for their religious administration, the TSPM does not consider them cults or sects. Thus, these three groups hold a strong group identity. This phenomenon demonstrates flexibility or reasonability in the process of socialist development. See Bays, *New History*, 197.

factories in the city operated by Christians provide fellowship gatherings and consultation services for their faculties. The caring spirit attracts nonbelievers to search for authentic answers for their spiritual solutions to their life problems.

Chinese evangelicals also are facing the long-term influence of cultural Christians. These cultural Christians are intellectuals, most of whom are scholars from prominent universities and research institutions, conducting some research on Christianity. They have published an increasing amount of academic writings on the study of Christianity through university publishing houses. However, most of these intellectuals have no religious commitments. Only a few confess their Christian faith but generally are not involved in church life.<sup>145</sup> Chinese intellectuals, including nonbelievers and believers, are more interested in the writing of “cultural Christians” than those of Chinese theologians. Their publications, misunderstood as orthodox Christian beliefs by many, have great influence among the intellectuals and the evangelical intellectuals as well. There is an urgent need for evangelicals to participate in academic research and publication to interact with these cultural Christians.

The expression of Chinese evangelical spirituality after 1978 demonstrates the power struggle between the government’s religious regulation and evangelicals’ pursuit of the right to freedom of expression. Since the government suppresses the establishment of denominations, the previous denomination distinctions gradually fade away. However, various communities have demonstrated their characteristics in several areas of spiritual practices.

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<sup>145</sup> Lee, “‘Cultural Christians’ Phenomenon,” 57.

## 7. 2018–Present

After a period of revival and rapid growth, evangelicals are facing the most difficult time since the revised Regulation on Religious Affairs came to effect on February 1st, 2018.<sup>146</sup> Protestants, especially those house churches without registration, have been harassed or arrested by the public-security organization or the police from time to time.<sup>147</sup> Since 2014, many crosses erected on the roof of the church buildings have been demolished. Not many evangelicals would expect that the persecution could get worse than that. However, it has been so since February 1st, 2018. Many non-government-sanctioned churches, for example, Beijing Zion Church with over one thousand church members, have been shut down. Surveillance camera systems are requested to be set up outside and inside the church buildings. One of their functions is to keep children under eighteen from entering the churches.<sup>148</sup> The students are required to fill out the forms with the information of their religious background, which may hurt their pursuit of a career. The churches now are not allowed to establish and operate hospitals, student centers, senior homes, and schools. In such a difficult context, Chinese evangelicals have to rethink the direction and strategy of development to fulfill the great commission.

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<sup>146</sup> The government recently exercises tight control over Chinese Christianity. The enthusiastic report of Chinese Christian fever by the westerners and the rapid growth of Chinese Christians have caught its attention. The government realizes that it should not take the role of the churches lightly because the churches in Russia and Eastern Europe have weakened the rule of the communist party. Furthermore, it is cautious about the activities of the churches because the June-Fourth democracy movement in 1989 and its connection with Christianity caused huge damage to its rule. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 97.

<sup>147</sup> Some local governments agree that churches can register as non-profit religious organizations at the Civil Affairs Bureaus with the approval of the Religious Affairs Bureaus, instead of registering as three-self churches. However, it is up to the Religious Affairs Bureaus to decide whether they will approve the registration. Therefore, even when house churches want to abide by the religious regulations to register, they may not get approval and have to operate as illegal entities, preparing to be shut down by the government.

<sup>148</sup> For quite a few years, under the influence of western churches, the churches have been running children Sunday schools and children choirs instead of children's care. The Religious Affairs Bureaus did not intervene until they firmly implement the religious regulations that forbid the conversion of the minors in public, including the churches.

Some suggest that Chinese evangelicals try to create more free space for the gospel by not labelling themselves as members or leaders of the non-government-sanctioned church, which are the obvious targets of the attack of the Religious Affairs Bureau. Bays suggests that Chinese evangelicals should make transparent their contacts with foreigners so that the government would not regard them as anti-state. He further suggests that the tension between Chinese Christianity and the Chinese government will wind down.<sup>149</sup> Many Chinese Christians think the government will take advice from many democrats to give Christians more space. However, the strict implementation of the revised Regulation on Religious Affairs demonstrates the attitude of the CCP, which intends to sinicize Christianity. Many people, including western Christians who look forward to Christianizing China, are concerned about where Chinese evangelicals will be heading in the future.

The motif of suffering for sustaining faith in Jesus becomes more complicated. From 1949 to 1976, the extreme members of the government actively and initiatively persecuted Christians, who passively endured suffering. Recently, the government persecutes Christians by accusing them of violating regulations. When some Christians actively speak up and question whether the regulations have violated the right of freedom of religion, they are particularly targeted and persecuted. However, some other Christians perceive that such advocacy is one of the causes of more intensive tension and conflict between Christians and the government, thus hinders the preaching of the gospel and other religious practices. Therefore, they criticize these Christian activists, which creates tension among Christian groups. Nevertheless, the tension is relieved when these Christian groups share the same suffering because of the tight control from the religious

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<sup>149</sup> Bay, *New History*, 203.

policies. Suffering as a motif of spirituality manifests its new characteristic in this new context.<sup>150</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

The context of the history of Chinese evangelicalism has gone through a change from western missionaries' "Christianizing China" to the Chinese government's "Synthesizing Christianity." Western missionaries saw the vision of Christ in China and planted the seed of Chinese evangelicalism, which bloomed along with the growth of the indigenous movements. Moreover, Chinese evangelicalism appeared to reach its "climax" when the rapid growth coined the term "China's Christianity Fever." Nowadays, it comes to its turn when the government firmly executes its intentional plan to synthesize Christianity.

The development of Chinese Christianity has been tainted by imperialism and a strong political agenda, especially from the perspective of the Chinese communist government and most Chinese people with nationalism.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, it is not easy for Chinese evangelicals to claim and prove that their actions are politics-free. Hence, they have to make extra efforts to deliver this message to create more space for the authentic goal of preaching the gospel.

Meanwhile, Chinese evangelicals have come to embrace their core identity in focusing on preaching the gospel. This identity became prominent when they

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<sup>150</sup> In chapter 3, I will talk about suffering under the theme of activities that promote the preaching of the gospel.

<sup>151</sup> Even if it is not involved with any western Christians, the relationship between Chinese Christians and the government has become the target of denouncement of many people in western society, accusing the CCP and Chinese government from a political perspective or for political purpose. While the white paper *China's Peaceful Development* published by the State Council in 2011 says, "China is firm in upholding its core interests which include the following: state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development." The CCP is sensitive and tough toward any issues related to national security and social stability.

distinguished themselves from the modernists or the liberals who focused on social concerns while compromising the authority of the Scripture. It also helps them to resist the pathway that the socialist government chooses for Chinese Christianity, which is resonant with the direction of the modernists. To be faithful to the gospel, Chinese evangelicals are open to the influence of western Christian traditions but claim that these foreign perspectives and practices do not confine them. Some Chinese evangelicals choose to be independent of western missionaries. Some do not reject the auxiliary support from them. While some can work under the patronage of western theologians, some prefer defining their relationship to be cooperative partners. Whatever ways Chinese evangelicals choose to be related to western missionaries, they have been appropriating western traditions to the immediate, short-term, and long-term context to promote the gospel as best as possible.

Furthermore, Chinese evangelicals focus on the work of the Holy Spirit, as seen in Nee, who was influenced by the holiness movement, and Jing, who was influenced by the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. They do not ignore the necessity of confession, repentance of sin, and the experience and theology of being “born again,” as seen in Wang.

Whereas, Ryan Dunch observes that the features of Chinese Protestantism are “warm, experiential piety, centered on a concern for salvation and for tangible blessings in this life; literal faith in the Bible.”<sup>152</sup> The pursuit of the blessing in this life can be tracked to the progressive teaching held and practiced by the modernists and the liberals, which is distinctive from the millennium and eschatological emphasis held by the churches in the indigenous movement decades ago. In the context of pursuing economic

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<sup>152</sup> Dunch, “Fragile, Fragmented, Flourishing,” 215.

growth, the pursuit of the blessings in this life weakens the emphasis on the suffering for the gospel. Chinese evangelicals, who are passionate about evangelism and sacrifice for Christ, have concern that the believers may be tangled by the pursuit of the blessings in this life.

Therefore, Chinese evangelicals seek to develop their spiritual maturity so that they can fulfill God's commission for them in the contemporary Chinese context. As Simon Chan notes, the strategy in Asia is not to change the political structure, but to advocate the profound spiritual liberation that comes through Christ.<sup>153</sup> Victorious spirituality is about overcoming temptations, finding strength amid extreme suffering, and receiving healing and deliverance.<sup>154</sup> This dissertation explores a hidden way that is shown by Christian mysticism.<sup>155</sup> As Chan shares, "tradition actually helps the church find the necessary resources to wrestle with contemporary situations."<sup>156</sup>

The development of spiritual maturity required for strengthening evangelism is to invite God to work in all areas of Chinese devotees' life, which include Christian doctrines and spiritual disciplines. As the history of Chinese evangelicalism demonstrates, theology and spirituality are not separated. Chan presents an example of constructing spiritual theology that includes both spiritual exercises and the perceptions of God and human beings, which this dissertation adopts.<sup>157</sup>

Chan mentions that evangelical theology greatly affects spirituality. Evangelicals do not develop the natural potentials of believers but focus on what God wants his people

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<sup>153</sup> Chan, *Grassroots*, 100–103, 113.

<sup>154</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 26.

<sup>155</sup> Western liberalism assumes that one of the churches' tasks is to confront power structures and participate in political struggles. See Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 31.

<sup>156</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 29.

<sup>157</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 9.

to become.<sup>158</sup> The evangelical perceptions of God and human beings keep our attention from being deviated to emphasizing mere human effort for living a spiritual life. The inseparability of theology and spiritual life is a legacy of Chinese evangelicals. It is also valued by Christian mysticism, which will be explained in chapter 3. Contemporary evangelicals should strive for inheriting such a legacy in the face of challenges that separates knowledge seeking and spirituality seeking. The construction of a future Chinese spiritual theology needs this practice to avoid the failure of achieving the purpose of transformation by the Holy Spirit in Christ for the world, which this dissertation will demonstrate in chapter 5.

Regarding spiritual disciplines, I resonate with Chan that “utterly basic, small acts, which over time form the Christian character.”<sup>159</sup> As this dissertation explores the situation of contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality and develops a future spiritual theology, however, it needs to focus on some primary areas of the spiritual life. Chan singles out prayer because he perceives that all other spiritual exercises depend on it. Furthermore, Chan teases out spiritual disciplines according to the following three categories: focusing on God and self, the Word, and the World. And he values the development of a rule of life to keep the practices coherent and effective. Furthermore, given the challenges during the journey of spiritual progress, Chan demands a necessity of spiritual discernment and the guidance of spiritual directors. Chan’s construction may attract many believers or Christian groups who are treading the water of spirituality from western Christian perspectives. Even though Chan claims to be inclusive, keeping in view

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<sup>158</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 9–10.

<sup>159</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 126.

both western and Asian perspectives, he cannot give priority to the consideration of Mainland Chinese evangelicalism.<sup>160</sup>

Therefore, drawing upon Chan's wisdom, this dissertation adapts his core themes of spiritual practices into reading the Bible, prayer, hymns and worship, life engaging with the world to promote the preaching of the gospel, and communal life, according to the development of Chinese evangelicalism and its contemporary context.

Reading the Bible, which Chinese evangelicals emphasize, is parallel to Chan's spiritual exercises focusing on the Word. And life engaging the world is corresponding to Chan's spiritual exercises focusing on the world. I keep the motif of prayer but handle it from a different perspective. If we perceive prayer as a practice that keep believers in the presence of God, we may understand Chan's approach. However, many Chinese evangelicals regard faith, rather than prayer, as the way to tie believers to God. It is more reasonable for them to take prayer as one of the core aspects of spiritual life as parallel to reading the Bible.

I replace the motif of spiritual exercises focusing on God and self with hymns and worship and communal life because Chinese evangelicals are more community-oriented than individual-oriented. They primarily feel the presence of God in worship and praise. Furthermore, their community has greatly influenced the formation of their identity. I also include the motif of spiritual direction in the communal life because spiritual direction manifests the relationship of individuals or between individuals and groups in communal life.

Regarding the discussion of spiritual discernment, I propose to draw upon Christian mysticism to strengthen it since it is a weak area for many Chinese evangelicals.

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<sup>160</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 9, 11.

Therefore, the correlated interaction with Christian mysticism and the construction of a future Chinese spiritual theology will include a reflection on this motif.

## CHAPTER 2: MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND MYSTICAL SPIRITUALITY

Christian mystical spirituality has its distinct characteristics and language of description. Two crucial terms that define the essence of Christian mysticism are “union with God” and “the presence of God.” McGinn observes that some scholars define “union with God” as “some form of union with God, particularly a union of absorption or identity in which the individual personality is lost.”<sup>1</sup> He notes that such a definition gives the impression that “union with God” promotes elitism. He claims that mystical union with God is a spiritual experience that is open to all Christians rather than the spiritual elites.<sup>2</sup> Thus, he proposes to define Christian mysticism as a process or way of life that “concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.”<sup>3</sup>

In this dissertation, neither “union with God” nor “the presence of God” refers to the full status of exclusively identifying with God. Instead, both terms have the core meaning that the devotees desire to live a life with God at the center and make progress toward this essential *telos* of life.<sup>4</sup> They may not reach the fullness of union with God in their life on earth or the furthest spiritual stages described by the mystics.<sup>5</sup> Noel

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<sup>1</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvi.

<sup>2</sup> McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 122.

<sup>3</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvi–xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Underhill notes that Christian mysticism works from the bottom up instead of a high level that only the elites can attain. See Underhill, *Essentials*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> A full union with God does not refer to the status that only can be acquired when one meets Jesus face to face in eternity, as described by Paul (1 Cor 13:12). It is the most intimate loving and knowing God

O'Donoghue notes that many devotees remain all their lives in their third mansion, referred to in *The Interior Castle* of Teresa of Ávila. However, they may actively engage in the unitive process and demonstrate Christian mystical spirituality.<sup>6</sup> Thus, “union with God” and “the presence of God” are interchangeable terms in this dissertation.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, this dissertation defines mystical theology as the study of mystical spirituality, including beliefs, practices, and experiences related to mysticism. Mystical experiences demonstrate the spiritual reality of God's presence in human life and humanity's union with God.<sup>8</sup> Mystical experiences of encountering God may lead to loving knowledge of God and knowledge of self and the world. According to Chan, mystical experiences under the study of mystical theology are extraordinary phenomena, even though they may involve contact with the world of spirits, but these are within the context of the Holy Spirit's distinctive work.<sup>9</sup> Mystical theology is inseparable from mystical experiences and should have its grounding in mystical experiences.<sup>10</sup> Mystical experiences are indispensable elements of mystical theology, which prevent mystical theology from becoming merely theoretical speculation.<sup>11</sup>

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that was, is, or will be granted by God amid the limitation of the devotees' life on the earth. It is not a speculation but a witness of God's grace based on the devotees' experience. From the evangelical perspective, the devotees' union with God starts when they are born again in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> O'Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 70. Teresa used travelling through the seven mansions of an interior castle as a metaphor for the journey of spiritual development. The seventh mansion stood for the most intimate relationship with God.

<sup>7</sup> However, we still need to note that individual mystics have their implication and language to expound their understanding of union with God.

<sup>8</sup> Underhill notes that “an overwhelming consciousness of God and of one's own soul” is the central fact of mystical experiences. See Underhill, *Essentials*, 9, 11. However, it takes further researches to argue that the mystical experiences of non-Christian mystics are evidence of encountering God. Furthermore, the comparative study of mystical experiences of both Christian mystics and non-Christian mystics needs more exploration. See Payne, *John of the Cross*, 218.

<sup>9</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 149.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Williams opines that the experience that has its root in Christ and the Scripture should shape theology. See Williams, “Theological Method,” 171.

<sup>11</sup> In the history of Christianity, the patristic Fathers naturally integrated theological exploration with Christian experience. During the period of scholasticism, theological pursuit became isolated from

In light of this, mystics seek to interpret their mystical experiences.<sup>12</sup> The mystic's background including their theological convictions may lead to a particular interpretation of mystical experiences. Jure Kristo opines that “[s]imilarities and differences of the communication about experiences with allegedly ontological content are rooted in the respective traditions of each particular mystic, his or her upbringing, theological and philosophical education, commitment to the postulates of faith, and so on.”<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, theological convictions may evoke particular mystical experiences. Kristo notes, “[u]nion with God is expected, because it is believed...that ‘the soul’s center is God’ and that one has to reach this center.”<sup>14</sup> McGinn resonates, “mystical theory in most cases precedes and guides the mystic’s whole way of life,” thus it is not something adding on to mystical experiences.<sup>15</sup> Edward Howells argues, “We need theology to make sense of mystical experience.”<sup>16</sup> In short, even though the spiritual reality and mystical experiences exist without relying on mystical theology, mystical theology can guide the pursuit of mystical experiences.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Kristol notes, “we should not neglect the warning of all the more capable Christian mystics that the extraordinariness of the experience is the least important part of mystical progress.”<sup>18</sup> The devotees should desire union with God rather

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Christian experience. However, contemporary Christianity has demonstrated the desire for and the tendency of the integration of theology and experience again.

<sup>12</sup> The accounts and interpretation of mystical experiences vary. When the analysts approach mystical experiences of a particular mystic, they should respect his or her teachings of mysticism and consider the social-historical and theological context. See Parsons, “Psychoanalysis and Mysticism,” 152.

<sup>13</sup> Kristo, “Interpretation of Religious Experience,” 36.

<sup>14</sup> Kristo, “Interpretation of Religious Experience,” 33.

<sup>15</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Howells, “Mystical Theology,” 45.

<sup>17</sup> George Lindbeck notes that religions are not merely the expression of religious experience but produce religious experience. See Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 33. When McGinn constructs a map of the history of mystical theology, his work is based on the conviction that almost all mystics have a theology. See McGinn, “Genealogy,” 65.

<sup>18</sup> Kristo, “Interpretation of Religious Experience,” 38.

than mystical experiences.<sup>19</sup> In other words, mystical experiences should never be a goal for the devotees.<sup>20</sup> Instead, they are personal proof of the worthiness of living so that the devotees can begin a new journey to strive for the *telos* of their life.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship between mystical experiences and mystical theology is more complicated than so-called dialectical mutual dependent relations.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Chinese evangelicals should accept the reality of mystical experiences, while approaching the controversial perspectives of mystical theology with scrutiny.<sup>23</sup> Many scholars, including McGinn, note that when devotees become conscious of their experience of the presence of God, it would bring about their transformation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the practical and experiential meaning of union with God is the soul's likeness to God. Therefore, while Christ-likeness is the goal of spiritual growth for Chinese evangelicals, this dissertation attempts to draw upon Christian mysticism to aid the spiritual transformation of Chinese evangelicals.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the research of Christian mystical spirituality prepares for the exploration of a pathway to the future of Chinese evangelical spirituality, with transformation as its goal, which will aid the preaching of the gospel.

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<sup>19</sup> Underhill notes that the pursuit of an increase of knowledge, health, happiness, intercourse with spirits, and mystical experiences is all off the track of union with God. See Underhill, *Essentials*, 13–14.

<sup>20</sup> Mark McIntosh notes that “[m]ystical writers again and again warn against paying much attention to religious feelings or preoccupation with various experiential states.” See McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Kristo, “Interpretation of Religious Experience,” 38.

<sup>22</sup> Biderman, “Mystical Identity and Scriptural Justification,” 69.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Müller notes that mysticism expands boundaries of any confession or religion. See Müller, “Evangelical Spirituality and Mysticism,” 7. However, a phenomenon shared the same outward appearance may not share the same source or the same theological conviction. Many people advocate the interfaith dialogue grounded on the similarity of mystical experience. However, their advocacy may weaken the doctrinal distinctions. Evangelicals note that the similarity of mystical experiences is not the base for ignoring the doctrines. Instead, the doctrines are still playing an essential role in guiding the interpretation of the experiences.

<sup>24</sup> McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> The language such as “identical with God,” “divinization,” “deification,” “divine likeness,” and “the ground, or spark of the soul” may or may not refer to human beings having the same nature as God. The readers need to clarify the particular meaning of such terms in their textual context. See Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis*, 1–12.

This chapter will explore key figures and writings in the history of Christian mysticism. It will try to disclose the “visions” of their spirituality behind and beyond their historical context.<sup>26</sup> In other words, it is not meant to be a comprehensive study of the classical mystics, but rather, an investigation of root ideas shared by Christian mysticism that establishes a pattern of mystical thought, which affects the development of evangelical spirituality. Therefore, this chapter will provide an outline of the primary characteristics of mysticism and explore how some of these motifs emerge within the development of early Chinese Christian spirituality, particularly in the spiritual theology of Watchman Nee, thus forms the basis for contemporary Chinese evangelicals to appropriate mystical ideas because Nee has greatly influenced grassroots Chinese Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

### 1. Key Figures and Works in the History of Christian Mysticism

Early churches and theologians did not define a distinctive realm of Christian spiritual life under the name “mysticism.” Influenced by Platonism, many Alexandrian Christians and the early Greek Fathers considered the exegesis of the Scripture as mystical contemplation that unlocked divine knowledge, which was ushered in by Christ. Worship

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<sup>26</sup> Some works do not manifest historical context, for example, *The Cloud of Unknowing* that was in the time of natural disasters such as the plague and human violence such as the Hundred Years’ War and Peasants’ Revolt. This phenomenon may reflect the attitude of the mystics that they tended to turn away from the chaos of the world and contemplate the unchanging holiness, beauty, and love of God. Therefore, we can observe that these mystics valued contemplation more than the active involvement in the world. Furthermore, like the works of Pseudo-Dionysus, *The Cloud of Unknowing* bore strong apophatic flavour. It not only provided practical instruction on the contemplative life but also strongly exhorted the seekers to strip away all earthly ways to approach God, who was the mysticism of darkness. The mystics had to pass through the cloud of forgetting and break the cloud of unknowing to reach God, which demanded a life of solitude with the contemplative prayer that concentrated solely on God. Therefore, it may apply to any historical situation. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Simon Chan notes that Nee’s spiritual theology as grassroots theology still plays its essential role among the non-elite Christians, which constitute the majority of Chinese Christians. Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 24, 42.

and the sacraments were also regarded as mystical because they denoted the hidden presence of Christ.<sup>28</sup> The churches, however, had guarded against the possible corruption brought by Platonism. The exegesis and life of Origen demonstrated this struggle.<sup>29</sup>

### Origen (185–254)

Origen lived in a time when the Roman emperors Septimius Severus, Maximinus I, and Decius persecuted Christians. During this period of violent suffering, Origen not only desired martyrdom but was also committed to profound “ethical reflection, spiritual attentiveness, and devotion to God,” which was the characteristics of “philosophic life” in his age.<sup>30</sup> Origen’s primary influence was among educated people.

Origen adopted an exegetical approach demonstrating the necessity of progressive growth for Christians to read the Scripture and acquire the knowledge of God. He espoused the three levels of understandings of the Scripture: the flesh, the soul, and the spirit.<sup>31</sup> The simple could only understand the flesh of the Scripture, which was the literal meaning of the text. Those who made progress in Christian living could understand the soul of the Scripture, through anagogical reading. While the perfect could receive the

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<sup>28</sup> The term “mystical” has Greek origins. It appeared first in the literature of Greek mystery religions and Neoplatonic philosophers. Harvey Egan notes that Philo of Alexandria was probably “the bridge between the Jewish and Greek worlds for the transposed use of the word ‘mystical’ as the later Fathers of the Church used it with respect to scripture.” See Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 1–2.

<sup>29</sup> Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and many other major orthodox theologians of the second half of the second century focused on presenting the truth of the gospel or Christian faith. They were antignostic. Building on the teaching of Clement, Origen developed the spiritual senses of the soul. See McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 99–100. Moreover, he was the church’s first explicit mystical theologian. See McGinn, *Essential Writings*, 6. Thus, I start the introduction of the key figures with Origen.

<sup>30</sup> Casiday, “Origen and His Followers,” 148.

<sup>31</sup> Origen attempted to perceive that a human being was composed of flesh or body (*soma*), soul (*psyche*), and spirit (*pneuma*). The body referred to humanity’s material component. Origen did not deem the body as evil. The soul referred to the fallen intellect. It could be redirected to the contemplation of God through the instruction of spirit. Alternatively, it could be dragged below by the carnal senses to the body. The spirit referred to the created participation in the Holy Spirit, who was inactive in fallen humanity. However, Origen, as well as Clement, was aware of the potential danger to make fundamental divisions within a human being. See McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 114, 124.

spirit of the Scripture, the wisdom, and the spiritual law, through allegorical reading.<sup>32</sup> For Origen, anagogical reading “meant interpretation specifically oriented toward discerning the eschatological dimension of the Scripture, while the allegorical dealt with the mysteries of doctrine.”<sup>33</sup> Allegorical method allowed Origen to describe the fulfillment of God’s mystical plan for the world.<sup>34</sup> To be educated by the Scripture to pursue divine truth, Origen noted, persons with a yearning desire for God should be transformed and shun the pursuit of material satisfaction.<sup>35</sup> Origen was famous for his ascetic practices of detaching from material pursuits and earthly desires. He regarded asceticism as a path toward martyrdom. Asceticism, charity, and a virtuous life were both a preparation for and a reaction to the *erotic, epoptic* knowledge of God.<sup>36</sup>

Origen also contributed to Christian mysticism by applying the expression “spiritual senses” to the soul.<sup>37</sup> Employing the concepts of the inner person and the outer person, Origen taught that the inner person used the spiritual senses to read the Scripture, and the outer person used the physical senses to relate to the material world. Thus, yearning love between human beings and the Divine being, rather than carnal love

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<sup>32</sup> Casiday, “Origen and His Followers,” 148–49.

<sup>33</sup> O’Keefe, “Anagogical Interpretation,” 51.

<sup>34</sup> O’Keefe, “Allegory,” 50.

<sup>35</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 125–26. God, who was love, planted the yearning. The soul was *eros* ii when the emphasis was on the power of yearning desire. And God was referred to be *Eros* I as he was the source of the love with divine distinction. Thus, Origen distinguished carnal love and heavenly love. Origen also taught that one must love God without measure, love our neighbours as ourselves according to their role in Christ’s body, and love our enemies. Our love toward the objects should be in the proper orders according to the teachings of the Scripture.

<sup>36</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 125–26. The *erotic, epoptic* knowledge of God referred to the mystical knowledge of God acquired when the Word led the soul away from the pursuit of material satisfaction and educated it to yearn for God.

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 264. Gavrilyuk and Coakley note that “the expression ‘spiritual senses’ (*sensus spirituales*) is first attested in the Latin translation of the works of Origen of Alexandria.” See Gavrilyuk and Coakley, “Introduction,” 2.

between a human couple, was supposed to be the motif of the interpretation of the Song of Songs.<sup>38</sup>

Origen was also influential because of his perspectives on the relationship between the contemplative life and the active life. He valued the contemplative life more than the active life, based on his interpretation of Jesus' teaching in Luke 10:38–42. For Origen, Jesus praised Mary over Martha, which indicated the superiority of contemplation, represented by Mary, over action, represented by Martha. However, Origen insisted that both the contemplative life and the active life must work together for the soul's growth. The activity, especially at the levels of *ethica* and *physica*, was necessary for the soul to overcome the unruly passions and acquire a contemplative or theoretic level of *epoptica*.<sup>39</sup>

Origen's teachings on the nature of union with God, the nature of fallen humanity, and the return to the Divine caused many controversies. Even though he based his teachings on the understanding of the incarnation of Christ, the heavy platonic flavour obscured his intention to relate faithfully to God through contemplation, encounter, transformation, and Christian identity.<sup>40</sup> The main motif of Origen's mysticism was the process of the return of the fallen soul to God as a journey upward or an ascension. Origen interpreted many passages of the Word as the itinerary of returning. The soul was like the Israelites, who wandered through the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land.<sup>41</sup> Origen also perceived the ascension to the contemplation of God as the process of the

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<sup>38</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 126.

<sup>39</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 126. Clement had proceeded Origen regarding the exhortation on the relationship between the contemplative life and the active life. McGinn notes that the levels of *ethica* and *physica* may be similarly equivalent to the purgative stage and the illuminative stage adopted by later scholars.

<sup>40</sup> Trigg, *Origen*, 64–66. Origen had been condemned as a heretic in the sixth century. But his survived works have influenced the later mystical thinking.

<sup>41</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, 172.

deification of the soul. In *The Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, he said, “since the mind that has been purified and has ascended above all material things, that it may scrupulously contemplate God, is made divine [*theopoiēsthai*] by what it contemplates.”<sup>42</sup> Becoming like God through fellowship with divinity, Origen held, human nature might become divine, not only in Jesus but also in all those who believed and went on to undertake the life commanded by the Scripture.<sup>43</sup>

Motifs such as the detachment from material things and self-desire, the relationship between contemplation and activity, the necessity of progress in charity and a virtuous life for better understanding of the divine truth, erotic expression of love for God, and deification in union with God in Origen’s works became the constant motifs of Christian mysticism. Other mystical theologians developed these motifs.<sup>44</sup> However, many aspects of Origen’s perspectives on God, the soul, and the universe, especially the perspective on deification, were deemed as a corruption of Platonism, which made them controversial, thus hindered their reception by the main streams of Christianity for more than one thousand years. Whereas, Origen critically employed the philosophy of Platonism according to the church’s rule of faith, as a necessary preparation for the study of the Scripture.<sup>45</sup> He also grounded his theology in the exegesis of the Scripture. He noted the grammatical sense of the words and the historical reality of the passages. However, he emphasized the essentiality of the spiritual reading of the Scripture and reminded devotees that they should know when to discard the carnal reading.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 406.

<sup>43</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3:28.

<sup>44</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> Trigg, *Origen*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 111.

Origen's ascetic lifestyle and his ideal of virginity influenced the formation of monastic spirituality. Early monasticism emphasized the practice of withdrawing from the world, which allowed some mystics to focus on pursuing spiritual insights and acquiring mystical experiences. Among the representatives of the early monasticism, D. D. Martin comments that the Cappadocian Fathers, including Basil the Great (330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (335–395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389), Evagrius Ponticus (345–399), and Pseudo-Dionysius (?475–525), “created the formative legacy for medieval mysticism.”<sup>47</sup> When I explore the legacy of these figures, I handle it from mystical perspectives instead of monastic tracks. Many believers, including Mainland Chinese evangelicals, have the impression that monastic life represents working to secure one's salvation. However, asceticism and monasticism do not necessarily imply works for salvation. For these fathers, asceticism and monasticism just provided a way to achieve their goal of pursuing the presence of God. They believed that through vigils, fasts, and other exercises of the body, the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the soul to show the way of repentance that the soul may be purified.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, ascetic practices may not conflict with the work and grace of the Holy Spirit in salvation and transformation.

Martin also includes Augustin of Hippo (354–430) in the list of the most influential theologians in the development of the mystical tradition.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, I will focus on the above six figures as the representatives of Christian mysticism before medieval period for exploring the core themes of Christian mystical spirituality.

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<sup>47</sup> Martin, “Mysticism,” 570.

<sup>48</sup> Casiday, “Origen and His Followers,” 154–55.

<sup>49</sup> Martin, “Mysticism,” 570.

### The Cappadocian Fathers

The Cappadocian Fathers had a close relationship: Basil of Caesarea (330–379) and Gregory of Nyssa (335–395) were brothers, and they were the friends of Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389). They, especially Basil the Great, contributed to the development of monasticism. Basil held that an organized and disciplined life was necessary for the spiritual soundness of the devotees. Therefore, he set up rules for the monastic community that he established.<sup>50</sup> Gregory of Nyssa led a monastic and ascetic life but actively participated in church affairs. The active life did not hinder his contemplative life. He exhorted others to practice the discipline of the desert *internally* to make progress toward the contemplation of God.<sup>51</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus loved solitude to the point that he cut himself off from the world. Therefore, he had much time to exercise contemplation.<sup>52</sup> The contemplative knowing of God affirmed his theological perspectives that his writings manifested.

The Cappadocian Fathers influenced Christian theology, especially Eastern Orthodox spiritual theology, through their contribution to the development of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Basil held that the Son shared the one substance with the Father (*homoousion*) amid the challenge of many Christians who preferred that the Son was “like substance” to the Father (*homoiousion*).<sup>53</sup> The Council of Nicaea settled the issue of *Homoousion* but many Christians constantly challenged it. The Cappadocians stood up to the challenges

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<sup>50</sup> McEnhill and Newlands, *Christian Thinkers*, 87.

<sup>51</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 22–23.

<sup>52</sup> Letham, “Three Cappadocians,” 195.

<sup>53</sup> Letham, “Three Cappadocians,” 191.

throughout their life. Gregory of Nazianzus firmly advocated the union of the fully human nature and the fully divine nature in Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Besides, the Cappadocian Fathers held on to the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. It was against many non-orthodox perspectives, including regarding the Spirit as a force or a creature. Basil negated the claims of the Spirit-fighters who denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, he presented his pneumatology in his work *On the Holy Spirit*. He held that the Scripture on the operations and activities of the Holy Spirit supported that the nature of the Holy Spirit was the nature of God. Furthermore, the liturgy that linked Father, Son, and Spirit together indicated that the Holy Spirit was inseparable from Father and Son. However, Basil attempted to present that the Spirit and the Son had different natures of origin from the Father. He said that the Father begot the Son, while the Spirit was from the Father. For the latter, he tried to avoid the wordings such as generate or begotten.<sup>55</sup> Thus, he delivered the message that in light of the distinction among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, three persons of God were fully divine.

Basil was sophisticated in retaining the tension by identifying the distinction of some theological subjects while holding to orthodox perspectives. His theological articulation of the unity and diversity in the Trinity demonstrated his ability. Basil chose to define *ousia* and *hypostases* differently.<sup>56</sup> *Ousia* referred to the essence or substance while *hypostases* alluded to a particular embodiment of a substance. Through this approach, Basil opined that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit shared the same *ousia*

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<sup>54</sup> McEnhill and Newlands, *Christian Thinkers*, 86, 90.

<sup>55</sup> McEnhill and Newlands, *Christian Thinkers*, 87–88.

<sup>56</sup> Some theologians such as Athanasius perceived that *ousia* and *hypostases* had the same essence.

while possessed different *hypostases*, which indicated that they had three particular embodiments of the same essence.<sup>57</sup> Particularity did not hinder unity, which contributed to the development of mystical theology. It allowed the devotees to expound the individual and corporate roles of three persons of the Trinity in the union of humans and God from both ontological and experiential perspectives.<sup>58</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa built on Basil's perspective on the Trinity and confirmed that the operations of God were operations of the Father through the Son in the Spirit.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he noted that human beings could see God in Christ because God became human. Robert Letham comments that Christ's humanity and divinity underlie the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification.<sup>60</sup> Christ's incarnation built the foundation for the union of humans and God. From Gregory's perspective, the ultimate goal of redemption was the deification of humans, which humans acquired through union with Christ. Human bodies transformed by the body of Christ shared in his incorruptibility and immortality. Therefore, Gregory's deification did not mean the absorption into God. Instead, it was more a concept of participation in the bodily immortality, which implied the removal of the boundary between material beings and spiritual beings.<sup>61</sup> This concept was in accordance with Gregory's perspective that finally God would fulfill the words of St. Paul, "God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28)" by unifying all rational creatures with him.<sup>62</sup> Such a perspective of "all in all" may cause problems among Protestants who

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<sup>57</sup> McEnhill and Newlands, *Christian Thinkers*, 89.

<sup>58</sup> The coexistence of union and particularity was one of the characteristics of the Eastern Orthodox doctrines.

<sup>59</sup> McEnhill and Newlands, *Christian Thinkers*, 89.

<sup>60</sup> Letham, "Three Cappadocians," 220.

<sup>61</sup> Letham, "Three Cappadocians," 194.

<sup>62</sup> Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," 41.

emphasize the necessity of Christ's redemption in bringing about unity between creatures and God.

Meanwhile, Gregory perceived that a divine element, which was capable of seeing something of God, existed in each human soul, building an affinity between human and divine nature. On the one hand, he asserted that devotees could meet God without the created vision. Through contemplation, devotees could enter into the mysticism of darkness to the unknowable and boundless God.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, he also ascertained the possibility that humans perceived God through spiritual senses. They acquired these spiritual senses through baptismal purification, ascetic purification, and union in Christ and the Spirit.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, he upheld both seeing and unseeing in union with God.

Furthermore, Gregory acknowledged the necessity of both divine initiation and human effort in the experience of encountering God. He noted that contemplation and action were inseparable. Instead, ultimately contemplation flowed into action.<sup>65</sup> In a word, Gregory acknowledged the coexistence of several paradoxical features in mystical spirituality.

Gregory of Nazianzus, following Basil, stated clearly the distinction of the nature of origin between the Spirit and the Son in *Theological Orations*.<sup>66</sup> He articulated clearly that the Son was the begotten and the Spirit the emission. Regarding Christ, Gregory of Nazianzus clearly stated that Christ was always God that he did not abandon his deity by

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<sup>63</sup> Letham, "Three Cappadocians," 193. Robert Letham noted that Gregory had prepared the ground for the apophatic approach to know God when he emphasized that God was beyond the grasp of the human mind.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory, *Life of Moses*, xiii.

<sup>65</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 23–4.

<sup>66</sup> McEnhill and Newlands, *Christian Thinkers*, 90.

adding humanity when he became incarnate.<sup>67</sup> He opined that Jesus' divinization was the principal of the divinization of humans. Christopher Beeley comments that Gregory of Nazianzus "shares and expands on Origen's basic idea of the Christian's ascent to God through the meditation on, and therefore the doctrine of, Christ's divine-human identity."<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, Gregory of Nazianzus stressed the role of the Spirit in divination. He stated that the Spirit worked through faith, baptism, and spiritual growth to actualize Christ's divinization.<sup>69</sup> His teaching on the Trinity was fuller than the other two Cappadocian Fathers. Many Christians accepted it as orthodox.

Gregory of Nazianzus also stressed that no creature was capable of fully grasping God's nature.<sup>70</sup> He noted that human reason, the center of the image of God for humans, was the primary faculty for knowing God. However, corrupted by sin and the devil, human reason was limited.<sup>71</sup> Whereas, he acknowledged that devotees could acquire illumination if they went through purification. Illumination, the visionary knowledge of the incomprehensible God, could satisfy the desire that longed for him. Purification, from his perspective, was keeping the commandments to purify the flesh, thus removed the cloud that blocked the soul to see the divine light.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, purification was a radical change of the devotees' life instead of targeting particular sins or thoughts.

In summary, the Cappadocian Fathers defended Nicene Christology and stood up against the spiritual fighters, who opposed to the Spirit's divinity. Their works on Christology and Pneumatology led to the development of the theology of the Trinity.

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<sup>67</sup> Letham, "Three Cappadocians," 224.

<sup>68</sup> Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 272.

<sup>69</sup> Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 177.

<sup>70</sup> Letham, "Three Cappadocians," 196.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations*, 7–8.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, "Holy Lights," viii.

They also facilitated reflection on the coexistence of union and particularity. Meanwhile, they analyzed the huge gap between the nature of humanity and the nature of God, when they considered the unitive relationship between humans and God. If humans wanted to be united with God, they had to break through the boundary of corruptible bodies. It could only be perceived through grasping how Christ became incarnate, which had remained mystical. However, union with God could be experiential since God promised it in Christ through the Spirit. John Zizioulas opined that the Cappadocian Fathers' perspectives of the being of God broke through the limitation of the ancient monistic Greek philosophy that put the gnostic "gulf" between God and the world. Building upon their ecclesial experience, the Fathers understood the divine being from the perspective of loving relationships that being, which was life, meant communion.<sup>73</sup> Relational communion as a way of existence instead of human achievement became one distinctive characteristic of Eastern Orthodox spirituality.

#### Evagrius Ponticus (345–399)

Evagrius lived in a hermitage in Egypt. The life of Anthony had influenced him, such as diagnosing and resisting the influence of demons.<sup>74</sup> Evagrius was also a disciple of the Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>75</sup> He had mystical experiences, and he sought advice from others to understand these experiences. Gaining wisdom, he developed the manuals of the spiritual

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<sup>73</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 224.

<sup>74</sup> Casiday regards Evagrius as one of Origen's followers. See Casiday, "Origen and His Followers," 155–57. However, according to Luke Dysinger, Palladius, one of Evagrius' disciples, did not associate Evagrius with Origen. Since Palladius was considered an expert on Origen, his failure to associate Evagrius with Origen may imply that Evagrius was not a disciple of Origen. Scholars connected Evagrius with Origen due to various reasons. Some perceived that they shared the similarity as crypto-Pelagians and tried to condemn either one of them. Some scholars misunderstood Evagrius' perspectives as Gnosticism because his language on the role of intellect in union with God was obscure. See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," 15–6.

practices for new monks and advanced monks. For the former groups, he focused on helping them to acquire detachment and perspectives to get ready for accomplishing the monastic life. For the latter, he targeted at their development with the aid of a roadmap, tackling the deeply challenging problems in their progressive life.<sup>76</sup>

Evagrius emphasized the role of the mind or intellect in the transformation of the soul. The mind, one of the three faculties of the soul, could guide the effective operation of the whole self. Another faculty, desire, could add fuel to the love for God and others. Also, a third faculty, resistance, could resist evil. These faculties of the soul would function well if the devotees used them constructively. Evagrius employed a list of eight evil thoughts or terrible temptations to diagnose their weaknesses and overcome them.<sup>77</sup> These eight evil thoughts were gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, sloth, pride, and vainglory.<sup>78</sup> These thoughts could have both external origination and internal or personal responsibility.<sup>79</sup> Intellect played an essential role in the transformation of human beings. Evagrius held that Christ was the first created intellect and became “fully human, then, in a corporeal sense, to bring about the transformation of all humanity, from its present state of mortal weakness to a share in God’s everlasting life.”<sup>80</sup>

Evagrius also developed a three-fold scheme of spiritual development: *praktiké* (ethical living or asceticism), *theoria physiké* (contemplation of creation), and *theologiké*

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<sup>76</sup> Stewart, “Evagrius,” 267.

<sup>77</sup> Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire Light of the Mind,” 501. Gregory the Great revised Evagrius’ list to compose a list of “seven deadly sins.” He replaced pride with envy and combined sadness and sloth. Evagrius’ list focused on forms of dangerous reasoning, i.e. tendencies of thinking, imagination, or concepts as means of temptation. Scholars should avoid identifying it with the list of sins. See Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 73.

<sup>78</sup> Stewart, “Eight Generic *Logismoi*,” 26–34.

<sup>79</sup> Stewart, “Evagrius,” 268.

<sup>80</sup> Daley, “Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy,” 29–30. Evagrius opined that Christ was the first created intellect with the indwelling of the Word of God. Such perspectives appeared unorthodox to many Christians.

(theology). Ethical living referred to spiritual practices, including fasting, keeping vigil, intercessory prayer, psalmody, almsgiving, and deeds of compassion. The goal of ethical living was to cleanse the mind and make it unreceptive to self-desire. With clear thinking that was free from the distorting effects of self-desire, devotees could be pure to see God and his will revealed in Scripture and creation, including nature and spiritual beings. Thus, they could participate in a contemplative union between them and God that Evagrius called theology. Therefore, full union with God required “a systematic and pedagogically-oriented model of the spiritual life.”<sup>81</sup> These three stages were similar to purgation, illumination, and union. Evagrius understood these three stages to be progressive but not strictly chronological or successive.<sup>82</sup> Since the devotees needed a continuous cleansing of their thoughts, a complete status of *theologiké* was impossible in the life on earth. Evagrius noted that the ultimate encounter of creatures with God would happen in the eschatological era; however, the devotees could taste the experience amid *praktiké* and *theoria physiké*.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, one characteristic of Evagrius was adopting the negation approach to know God. He noted that the object of knowing was to disclose the answer hidden in things. The ultimate goal was to see God or a vision of God, which the devotees could not attain without separating their minds from all earthly things.<sup>84</sup> He was in concord with Gregory of Nazianzus that they were reluctant to apply “any human concept or

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<sup>81</sup> Stewart, “Evagrius,” 264. One of the demonstrations was Evagrius’s work *Praktikos*, which provided a detailed exposition of the practical life. It described the nature and workings of the individual evil thoughts and provided the principal remedies against them. See Evagrius, *Ascetic Corpus*, 94–114.

<sup>82</sup> Stewart, “Evagrius,” 267.

<sup>83</sup> Casiday, “Origen and His Followers,” 155–56.

<sup>84</sup> Casiday, “Origen and His Followers,” 155.

image as an adequate representation of what God [wa]s in God's self."<sup>85</sup> Expressing his perspective of detachment, Evagrius noted that devotees should move away from the created to know the Creator, whom no creature could define.

Moreover, Evagrius held that God played the primary role in humankind's union with God. He opined that human beings exercised their will to depart from their fallen nature to return to God. However, he also noted that God facilitated the return of the fallen because he loved them by entering into the human condition through the incarnation of God the Son. The incarnation renewed the possibility of unmediated contact between the Trinity and creatures. Thus, Evagrius did not rule out the mediating role of Christ.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Evagrius clearly stated that unity with God did not combine human essence with divine nature.<sup>87</sup> However, Evagrius expressed his longing for the final reconciliation of all rational creatures with God when God would abolish the substantive boundaries between creature and Creator. As Gregory of Nyssa, he regarded it as the authentic status of "God will be all in all."<sup>88</sup> The nature of the mingling human essence and divine nature caused a controversial dispute among theologians that may cause the condemnation of some theologians as heretics.

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<sup>85</sup> Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," 27. Evagrius reminded us that Christ's human reality was not the final object of the devotees' contemplation. See Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," 32.

<sup>86</sup> Ielciu, "Doctrine Aspects," 25. See also Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 220–21. However, Evagrius approached salvation from his perspective of knowledge of God. He noted that the ultimate saving work of the Lord was forming in humans the resemblance of his image, which was the essential knowledge of God. Humans could not know God without Christ and beyond what God had revealed in Christ. See Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," 15–6, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Casiday, "Origen and His Followers," 155–56.

<sup>88</sup> Evagrius, *Great Letter 22–31*, Letter 22.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)<sup>89</sup>

St. Augustine, a giant of the patristic era, contributed to Christian mysticism through his profound spiritual insights. He had a mystical experience of God as the Light Unchangeable, which enlightened him to escape from his passionate sexual entanglements to return to God.<sup>90</sup> He had another joyful experience of mystical communion together with his mother, while they were waiting to embark to Africa at the port of Ostia shortly before her death.<sup>91</sup> Two persons receiving the same experience at the same time indicated that a transcendent being granted this mystical experience.<sup>92</sup> Augustine's reflection on these experiences disclosed the limitation of human nature and knowledge, his certainty of the divine presence, and the possibility of the unmediated vision of God.<sup>93</sup>

Drawing upon Neoplatonism, Augustine explained that the soul needed contemplation and avoidance of the distractions of the material world to achieve union with God.<sup>94</sup> He stressed that Christian contemplation should be rooted in the study of the Scripture, the church as the guarantor of the Scripture, and the capacity for theological discernment. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Christian soul was the motivating force and source of contemplation. Thus, Christian contemplation was

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<sup>89</sup> Augustine did not write any systematic treatise on mysticism. He, as the ecclesiastical authority, contributed to mysticism through the philosophical framework that he drew upon Neoplatonism, which he passed down to many mystical theologians. He also was influential because of his intellect and profound spiritual insights in his works. For a summary of his life, see Harkness, *Mysticism*, 79–89.

<sup>90</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 25–26. In this experience, Augustine heard a voice asking him to read Rom 13:13–14. See Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VII, x, 16.

<sup>91</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX, x, 25.

<sup>92</sup> William Parsons notes that Augustine became convinced that human effort could never acquire permanent union with God and co-experience of a vision with his mother disclosed the communal dimension of mysticism. See Parsons, "Psychoanalysis and Mysticism," 164, 166.

<sup>93</sup> Kenney, "Mysticism and Contemplation," 198–99.

<sup>94</sup> Contemplation for Augustine seemed to be primarily an intellectual process, searching for unchangeable God that led the soul to God. It demanded a great effort of intellect and will, accompanied by religious warmth. It was different from absorption in prayer as commonly understood by Western mystics. See Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 34.

participating in the life of the Trinity.<sup>95</sup> Contemplation as the activity of the Spirit was the divine motion out into creation and back through the divine reality.<sup>96</sup> In short, the distinctive features of Augustine's contemplation included the work of the Spirit, participation in the life of the Trinity, reflection on the Scripture, and the active role of the church in exposing the Scripture.<sup>97</sup>

Augustine's spiritual insights greatly influenced churches. He exhorted the search for God from an ecclesial perspective and in the ecclesial setting. By expounding biblical passages, Augustine taught congregations to regard searching for the presence of Christ and listening to his Word as the heavenly goal. He recommended ascetic practices such as mutual forgiveness and sharing goods for both individuals and the community to purify their souls and enable a fuller experience of God.<sup>98</sup>

Augustine also noted that contemplation helped devotees with the restoration of their image of God. He regarded the image as a particular kind of likeness "by which something both relates to and is expressive of its source."<sup>99</sup> The divine image possessed by human beings was the foundation for them to participate in the inner life of the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>100</sup> Augustine stressed that deepening our awareness of the Triune God's activity within the soul would bring the image to gradual restoration; however, it would never be complete in this life.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Kenney, "Mysticism and Contemplation," 200.

<sup>96</sup> Kenney, "Mysticism and Contemplation," 200.

<sup>97</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 262.

<sup>98</sup> Burns, "Ecclesial Mysticism," 202–15.

<sup>99</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 243.

<sup>100</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 244.

<sup>101</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 247.

Furthermore, Augustine upheld that the intellectual vision of God was inseparable from the passionate love for God.<sup>102</sup> McGinn notes that Augustine conveyed the message that love alone provided access to the vision of God in both *The Trinity* and *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*.<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, Augustine insisted that human beings could not love unless they know. Therefore, for Augustine, contemplation and loving activity or charity went hand in hand for restoring the divine image in fallen people.

Augustine encouraged the practice of contemplation. However, he noted that the soul could not proceed to contemplation without cleansing. The processes such as “introversion” were proximate preparation for contemplation.<sup>104</sup> Cuthbert Butler summarizes that Augustine distinguished

seven grades or degrees (*gradus*) in the functions or operations of the soul: it is the principle of life, of sensation, of intelligence, of morality; the fifth grade he characterizes as ‘*tranquillitas*,’ the calming of the passions; the sixth as ‘*ingressio*,’ the approach to contemplation; the seventh as contemplation. These last three correspond in idea to the familiar stages of purgation, illumination, and union. He uses, indeed, the actual word ‘purgation,’ but of the fourth grade...the fourth and fifth represent the process of ethical reconstruction and transformation of the self, the conflict with sin and the establishment of the soul in good, the difference between the two grades lying in this, that what was effected in the fourth is made permanent in the fifth.<sup>105</sup>

Butler did not clarify Augustine’s perception of purgation at the fourth grade or level, which was different from the “purgation” in the so-called three stages of spiritual ascension. According to Augustine, people and animals only shared the similar functions of the first two levels of the soul. The first level provided the ability to live, grow, and reproduce, while the second made all kinds of activity possible while keeping the parts of

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<sup>102</sup> Harkness, *Mysticism*, 87.

<sup>103</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 245.

<sup>104</sup> Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 28–29. Introversion refers to the mind abstracting itself from all the bodily senses, thus seeing itself in itself and knowing itself as mirrored in itself.

<sup>105</sup> Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 28.

the body in harmony. Human beings enjoyed the unique operation of the third level and further. The third level made all human beings the artisan of his or her life. It was from the fourth level and up that indicated the involvement of the divine being in their life. Augustine called the fourth level “excellency in the presence of an excellent being,” transited from “excellency about another thing.”<sup>106</sup> These two names indicated that he emphasized a qualitative change from the third level to the fourth level. Augustine noted that in the fourth level, the divine intervention purified the soul from the allurements of the world and the fear of death. Even though the soul would go through a mighty struggle, the goodness of the supreme and true God made the task of purification succeed. It was from this perspective that Augustine named the act of the fourth level “virtue.” From an evangelical perspective, this level experienced divine intervention through Jesus’ redemption that the soul was set free from the bondage of sin and death. It is in accordance with Augustine’s notion that the soul of the fifth level had been free from all corruption and purified of all its stains, thus it enjoyed “tranquility,” which did not mean that it had reached its maturity and perfection as that in the level of contemplation. The soul’s hard work against sins was not to purify it but keep it from the defilement of sins. While enjoying the tranquility, the soul was sophisticate in getting away from self-passion. The preparation directed the soul to the divine truth at the sixth level with less and less hindrance until it reached the final rest in God at the level of contemplation.<sup>107</sup>

I summarize Augustine’s perspective on the progressive growth and operations of the soul in the following chart, comparing Augustine to Mulholland’s thinking on spiritual journey.

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<sup>106</sup> Augustine, *Greatness of the Soul*, 109.

<sup>107</sup> Augustine, *Greatness of the Soul*, 98–106, 109.

Grade/Level	Name	Meaning	Mulholland's
First	Vitalization	Living, growing, reproducing	
Second	Sensation	Moving in harmony	
Third	Art	Creative in life	
Fourth	Virtue	God's goodness enabling the soul's self-purification	Awakening
Fifth	Tranquility	Purity becoming permanent	Purgation
Sixth	Initiation	The soul's gaze directed to Truth	Illumination
Seventh	Contemplation	Recollection	Union

As a bishop, theologian, and philosopher, converted from Manichaeism and Neoplatonism, Augustine searched for God until he attained rest. He profoundly influenced the world through his transformed life, theological ideas, methods to convert pagan philosophy for the heavenly purpose, and perspectives of charity in the body of Christ as love for God.

#### Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 500)

Dionysius the Areopagite or Pseudo-Dionysius, an unknown Syrian monk, was influential in the history of mysticism because of his work *The Mystical Theology*. Paul Rorem explains that from the Greek Fathers' perspective, "mystical" means "hidden" and "theology" originally means "God's word," i.e. the Scripture, thus we should interpret *The Mystical Theology* as "God's word, hidden" yet now also revealed (Eph 1:9 and Col 2:2-3).<sup>108</sup> That something of God was both hidden and revealed was the fundamental disposition, upon which the works of the Dionysian affirmations and negations built. Thus, the primary purpose of Dionysius' theology was not about mysterious experiences. Therefore, contemporary evangelicals should approach mystical tradition from its authentic meaning, leaving behind the presumption that mysticism was all about the

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<sup>108</sup> Rorem, *Mystical Theology*, 6-7.

extraordinary experiences.<sup>109</sup> Searching for the hidden revelation of God is the vision of mystical tradition that Chinese evangelicals can retrieve as it has its foundation in the Scripture.

Dionysius said that the human mind could not know God, but humans could experience or find God. He opined that contemplation was the only way to “divine darkness.” He did not deny the necessity of an affirmative approach to knowing God, but he perceived that the knowledge acquired through this approach was only the reflection of God, not the Godhead in itself.<sup>110</sup> He emphasized leaving all activities of the senses and the mind behind to seek contemplation of God.<sup>111</sup> He advised Timothy, his reader,

as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, [you] leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.<sup>112</sup>

For Dionysius, negation was not the opposite of affirmation. Instead, it was beyond affirmation because God was hyper-existent, that was, beyond existence. Because of Dionysius’ influence, mystical contemplation and apophatic mysticism became the distinctive subject for knowing God and union with God, who was “divine darkness.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Rorem, *Mystical Theology*, 6.

<sup>110</sup> Lossky, *Eastern Church*, 25, 27–30.

<sup>111</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 27.

<sup>112</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, 135.

<sup>113</sup> John Westerhoff, a contemporary pastoral theologian, summarizes Urban Holmes’ simple definition of a cataphatic means and an apophatic means of knowing God. The former refers to “an indirect way of knowing in which our relationship with God is mediated.” The latter refers to “a direct way of knowing, in which our relationship with God is not mediated.” See Westerhoff, *Spiritual life*, 53. Holmes notes that an apophatic technique of meditation focuses on emptying, while a cataphatic technique of meditation focuses on imagining. See Holmes, *Christian Spirituality*, 4. Bruce Demarest opines that cataphatic (with images) affirms God’s self-revelation mediated by the intellect and senses, while apophatic (without images) negating what one knows about God by ideas, images, and languages because God is unknowable by these means. See Demarest, “Apophatic and Kataphatic Ways,” 271.

Moreover, building on earlier sources, Dionysius formed a threefold pattern of purification, illumination/contemplation, and union/perfection as the soul's progressive ascension to God. Later mystical theologians developed his threefold pattern. Rorem comments that Dionysius' various terminology related to spiritual growth appears to "be the apostolic source for a venerable orthodox tradition."<sup>114</sup>

However, Dionysius employed the late Neoplatonic pattern of procession and return to talk about union with God. Those who had a concern over the corruption of Christianity by Neoplatonism raised doubts about such an approach.

Furthermore, Dionysius built his Trinitarian spirituality less on the exposition of theology and the Scripture than that of Augustine, according to Jaroslav Pelikan.<sup>115</sup> Thus, it appeared that Dionysius' perspectives had little basis in sacred scripture thus they were ignored by those who emphasized the essentiality of the Scripture.<sup>116</sup>

Dionysius affected some of the medieval monastic mystics and greatly influenced the northern mystics of the late middle Ages and early modern Catholic mystics, but he had less influence among Protestants.<sup>117</sup> For example, Hugh of Victor (c. 1096–1141) affirmed Dionysius' perspective of knowledge of God and combined it with love, putting love above knowledge.<sup>118</sup> Regarding Dionysius' influence among Protestants, as Karlfried Froehlich notes, "Protestant Biblicism did not remove the Dionysian corpus completely from sight."<sup>119</sup> However, many Protestants held a negative attitude toward Dionysius' texts. For example, John Calvin harshly criticized the Platonic elements in

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<sup>114</sup> Rorem, *Mystical Theology*, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, 19.

<sup>116</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, 31.

<sup>117</sup> McGinn, "Mysticism and the Reformation," 52–53.

<sup>118</sup> Rorem, *Mystical Theology*, 90.

<sup>119</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, 44.

Dionysius' works, even though he admitted that he could not despise some things in his book: *The Names of God*.<sup>120</sup> Martin Luther criticized that Dionysian mystical theology lacked the incarnation and suffering of Christ for knowing God. However, John of Scythopolis (sixth century) defended the orthodoxy and authenticity of the Dionysian writings, affirming that Dionysius' theology was in accordance with an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, Jesus' incarnation of both soul and body, and the salvation of both the soul and the body.<sup>121</sup> Maximus the Confessor (580–662) made a supplement to link Dionysian's negative theology with the incarnation. He said that

The knowledge of [God the Word] himself in his essence and personhood remains inaccessible to all angels and men alike and he can in no way be known by anyone. But St. John . . . claims that he has seen the glory of the Word as flesh . . . For it was not as God by essence. . . that the only-begotten Son gave this grace, but as having in the incarnation become man by nature . . . that he bestows grace on us who have need of it.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, to appropriate the vision of mystical tradition, Chinese evangelicals should not confine their consultation to some early Protestants.

After Dionysius, Christian mysticism stayed silent for several hundred years and then started to flourish in western Christianity from the eleventh century.<sup>123</sup> The

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<sup>120</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, 44.

<sup>121</sup> Rorem, *Mystical Theology*, 61–78.

<sup>122</sup> Egan, *Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 134–35.

<sup>123</sup> Few female mystics before the thirteenth century left their literature evidence as Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). Many women mystics were active in the monasteries instead of the ecclesial field. They were less educated, but other peers, particularly the male confessors, recorded and interpreted their mystical experiences and understanding, as was the common practice in their time. Hildegard of Bingen from Germany was famous because of her artistic writings and mystical visions. Hildegard's works did not focus on how the devotees attained the direct consciousness of God and its effect on them. See McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 327. The major themes of Hildegard's work were wisdom and compassion, which was from the Godhead's heart and worked in the creation through the incarnation of Christ. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 38–39. After the thirteenth century, the contribution of the women mystics made to the notion of consciousness of God's presence through the literature flourished. See McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, xi. Some scholars who studied these mystics raised questions about whether visions had psychological sources or neurological explanations, especially when the devotees appeared to be psychologically sick. However, the contribution they made to society may clear the doubt over the psychological problems. For example, Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), a Doctor of the Church, was known

following section presents some prominent medieval mystics, some representatives of specific mystical traditions, and some mystical works. As Martin notes, Richard of St. Victor was the first one who analyzed the life of contemplation systematically, and the Spanish mystics provided practical and methodical guidance on prayer. Their works manifested systematic handling of particular Christian mystical traditions. I include *The Imitation of Christ*, the Rhineland mystics, Brother Lawrence, and Madame Guyon because of their connection with Chinese evangelicals.<sup>124</sup> Chinese evangelicals have access to the perspectives of the Rhineland mystics because of Luther's analysis. While the Chinese versions of *The Imitation of Christ* have come to China since 1640 and influenced Chinese evangelicals through Protestants. Moreover, Chinese evangelicals translated the books of Madame Guyon and Brother Lawrence into Chinese around 1940. Since then, they have become popular among Chinese Christians. Thus, these mystics and their works provide some connection points for Chinese evangelicals to appropriate Christian mystical visions.

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for her numerous experiences of visions and ecstasies, reception of stigmata, emphasis on charity, and severe asceticism for purgatory. The experience of the dialogic fellowship with the loving God motivated her that she became an activist to serve the sick and the poor. She was also active in ecclesiastical politics to bring peace and unity to the church. As she lived at the age of the change of geographical view because of Colombia's arrival at North America in 1498 and the end of the Roman Empire because of the seizure of Constantinople by the Muslim Ottoman armies in 1453, her contribution was quite significant. See McGinn, *Vernacular Mysticism*, 204–5. Catherine proclaimed the role of Christ as the bridge from earth to heaven only through which humans could go to eternal life. However, she demonstrated her devotion to the blood of Christ and the Eucharist instead of the cross. See Maggi, "Italian Women Mystics," 380–83.

<sup>124</sup> Many scholars may not regard the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis, as a mystic. However, *The Imitation of Christ* presented elements of a mystical literature, such as union with God/Christ and detachment from the material pursuit, which are the reason for me to include it in the list of exploring mystical spirituality. This book instructed the devotees to pursue an intimate relationship with God, even though it warned about the desire for God out of curiosity.

## Richard of Victor (1120–1173)

Richard was the abbot of the Augustinian Abbey of St. Victor from 1162 until his death in 1173. He was the first theologian who worked on mystical theology systematically, including contemplation and preparation of the soul for contemplation. He noted that the essence of the soul was the image of God and the likeness of God, which was rationality and affection, respectively.<sup>125</sup> One of his works, *The Twelve Patriarchs* or *Benjamin Minor*, mainly talked about how reason and affection worked to advance the level of contemplation.<sup>126</sup> Richard described how the faculties of the soul pursued contemplation: “Reason is one thing. Affection is another thing. Reason, by which we distinguish things; affection, by which we love. Reason resulting in truth; affection, resulting in virtue. Right counsels are born from reason; holy longings, from affection. From the former, spiritual sense; from the latter, ordered affection.”<sup>127</sup>

Meanwhile, reason and affection could not produce truth and virtue without the help of imagination and senses. Imagination served reason while the five bodily senses served the affections. The imaginative faculty of the mind created and presented images through the literal use of images and the use of comparative images. These images brought the senses into the spiritual realm. The use of images was confined to corporeal things, but it examined things far beyond bodily senses. Furthermore, the use of comparative images came to “the understanding of the invisible things by means of the

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<sup>125</sup> Palmén, *Imagination*, 51.

<sup>126</sup> Richard depicted Jacob as the rational soul who worked toward truth and virtue through reason and affection. In *Benjamin Minor*, Jacob’s sons, wives, and maidens had their representations: Rachel-reason, Leah-affection, Bala-imagination, Zelpha-the five bodily senses, Dan-literal use of images, Naphtali-use of comparative images, Gad-abstinence, and Asher-patience. The relationships between the representations correlated to the relationships between these family members. As the narrative of Genesis presented, Dan and Naphtali were the sons of Bala, who served Rachel; and Gad and Asher were the sons of Zelpha, who served Leah.

<sup>127</sup> Richard, *Twelve Patriarchs*, 55.

form of visible things.”<sup>128</sup> Moreover, imagination and senses linked the reason and the affections to the world of sense perception, thus produced virtuous thoughts and deeds, including abstinence and patience. These virtues, in turn, controlled the bodily senses. Therefore, Richard held that imagination and senses were important and necessary for the soul to acquire the ultimate union with God. Without the mediating role played by imagination between the sensory world and the spiritual objects, the soul could not know the ultimate spiritual objects of contemplation.

Richard’s other work, *Benjamin Major* or *The Mystical Ark*, concerned the six forms of contemplation. Imagination, reason, and understanding, the three instruments of the mind, played the main role in the first two, the middle two, and the last two kinds of contemplation, respectively. In the first kind of contemplation, the soul analyzed corporeal things, the various operations of nature and humans, and morals. Reason started to participate in the second kind of contemplation to form the operation of imagination. Then based on the knowledge gained from the first and second kind of contemplation, the soul in the third kind moved to know the invisible objects. Moreover, reason empowered the soul to make the connection between the invisible things and the visible things through the similitudes revealed by biblical texts.<sup>129</sup> In the fourth form of contemplation, the soul created new images or reconstructed old images for understanding the divine things. The soul at this stage could connect knowing the divine image in the soul with knowing God.<sup>130</sup> Moving to the fifth grade of contemplation, the soul gained the divine insights that were not contrary to rational images or understanding gained in the fourth

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<sup>128</sup> Richard, *Twelve Patriarchs*, 70.

<sup>129</sup> Palmén, *Imagination*, 259–62.

<sup>130</sup> Palmén, *Imagination*, 225, 227.

grade. Finally, in the sixth grade, the soul acquired divine understanding that moved beyond the capacity of reason, a human faculty.<sup>131</sup>

Richard's mystical spirituality demonstrated the characteristics of Augustinian contemplation that the mind played an active role in thinking, meditation, and contemplation. The mind went from being undisciplined to being disciplined then beyond the reach of reason and imagination.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, Ritva Palmén notes that Richard built his writings on Neoplatonic dualism. The material level and the spiritual level were hierarchically structured. Moreover, Richard divided the visible and invisible reality, particularly divine objects. The exercises of the six forms of contemplation demonstrated that the soul ascended from the lower level to the higher level.<sup>133</sup> Some mystics, such as Saint Bonaventure (1221–1274) and Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), picked up Richard's perceptions of the grades of contemplation.<sup>134</sup> The language of “level” and “ascension” may give an impression that the soul's journey was lineage, with God at the end of the

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<sup>131</sup> Richard, *Twelve Patriarchs*, 161–62.

<sup>132</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 33–34.

<sup>133</sup> Palmén, *Imagination*, 3.

<sup>134</sup> Saint Bonaventure, a great Franciscan mystical theologian, demonstrated Christ-centered characteristics in mysticism by taking up the poverty of Christ, the suffering of Christ, and the service of Christ for the marginalized groups. Another Franciscan mystic, Angela of Foligno (1248–1309) built on this Christ-centered characteristic and added the practices of the internal cross to enter into the experience of Christ. Embracing the crucified Christ and the complete self-emptying of Christ on the cross became the foci of her mystical spirituality. See Angela, *Angela of Foligno*, 35–43. Because of Franciscan background, Bonaventure's theology tried to assimilate nature and the world. At the same time, Bonaventure also followed the Augustine approach, thus demonstrated the Triune characteristics. Both the Trinity and Christology were the essential metaphysical truths in his mystical theology. See McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 70–71. Bonaventure received a vision of a six-winged crucified seraph when he meditated in the same place where Francis received the stigmata. Thus, he was called the Seraphic Doctor. Based on this vision, Bonaventure drafted his mystical theological work *The Mind's Journey to God*. He employed the six-winged seraph as the symbol of the ascent to God. He also regarded the tabernacle in Exodus as the process of interiorization to the indwelling God. See McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 95, 96, 105. The six wings represented six levels of reflection moving from the physical world to the devotees' minds for seeking the signature of God's work, and to knowing God as the Trinity above human. The six stages involved the six powers of the soul, respectively: sense, imagination, reason, intellect, intelligence, and the illumination of conscience. The seventh and final stage was given as a divine gift through Christ the mediator when one ceased all intellectual operations and received divine supreme wisdom. Contemplation for Bonaventure was not merely a goal but also a journey. Bonaventure acknowledged that prayer and divine help were essential for this journey. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 37.

journey. However, as Teresa made clear, the soul may experience similar spiritual, mystical, and psychological phenomena at different stages. Furthermore, according to the perspective of some evangelicals, including Watchman Nee, union with God/Christ started at the time of the spiritual birth. Thus, during the spiritual journey toward full union with God, God within the soul accompanied the devotees all along.

In summary, Richard systematically applied psychological perspectives to explaining the mystical experience that demonstrated the mind ascended from visible things to invisible things and an ultimate transforming union. The psychological approach provided a practical framework for the spiritual quest that made Richard's work widely read and followed. Furthermore, Richard's anthropology indicated the necessity of the intentional and purposeful practice of self-examination of the soul to acquire the knowing of God.<sup>135</sup> The union, as the wedding with the divine spirit, indicated complete self-surrender and the ecstasy of human beings. The soul united with God would imitate Christ by participating in the compassionate work in the world.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, Richard integrated several dualistic poles in his mystical theology, such as the mind and the heart/affections, the soul and the world, and the visible beings and the invisible beings.

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<sup>135</sup> Palmén, *Imagination*, 50.

<sup>136</sup> The work of many mystics, including St. Francis of Assisi (1181/1182–1226), demonstrated the close relationship between imitating Christ and the charity in the world. Francis, a Catholic mystic after Richard of Victor, had lasting influence because of his charismatic and Christ-like life. He responded to a mystical calling coming from Jesus' demand to forsake his rich life to follow Jesus and live a life depending on alms, serving the poor, and saving souls. He demonstrated a life that he was conscious of God's all-pervading presence in nature, animals, the unstable pilgrimage, and the burden of the world. He established the Franciscan order to gather and organize people who followed a similar calling and helped to establish a similar order for women led by Clara (1193?–1253). See Harkness, *Mysticism*, 95–99. Francis was well known for his vision of a crucified seraph with six wings and receiving the stigmata of five wounds of Christ after weeks of fasting and contemplation on Christ's suffering. His example of humility, forgiveness, and radical sacrificial love for the troubled world, accompanied by his authentic mystical experience, has inspired many to imitate Christ's life on earth. See McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 70–71. Franciscan spirituality has contributed to the formation of several devotional practices such as the Christmas crib and the Stations of the Cross. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 35–36.

### The Rhineland Mystics

The best-known medieval mystics for evangelicals, the Rhineland mystics, were a group of several men, including Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), Henry Suso (1295–1366), Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), and John of Ruusbroec (1293–1381).<sup>137</sup> They actively engaged in theological debates. Meanwhile, they attempted to integrate the deepest levels of the inward experience of God into the theological realm. The main themes of their works were the mutual dwelling of human beings and God, the ground of the soul, the way of self-denouncement, the process of detachment, and the ultimate knowledge of imageless and formless God. *Theologia Germanica* selectively handled the mystical themes of Eckhart and Tauler that emphasized the submission of the human will to the divine will, which Luther appreciated.<sup>138</sup>

Eckhart had a formal advanced theological education and became provincial of the Saxon Province entrusted with the reform of the Dominican houses in Bohemia in 1307. He was also a popular preacher with high status and reputation. He expressed his thought in his sermons and treatises.

Eckhart was contemporary to Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). However, while the ecclesiastic authority accepted Aquinas as the Doctor of the Church, it condemned some of Eckhart's teachings as heretical.<sup>139</sup> Instead of following the Aristotelian philosophy as

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<sup>137</sup> McGinn, *Harvest of Mysticism*, 84. The influence of the mysticism initiated by Eckhart had spread beyond the geography of the Rhineland region. Furthermore, John of Ruusbroec was Dutch.

<sup>138</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 60. *Theologia Germanica* also summed up the spiritual teachings of the Friends of God, thus had a flavour of resistance to the authority of the church and promoted a deep consciousness of the inner life.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Aquinas incorporated the philosophical perspectives of Aristotle into theology, instead of following Augustinian tradition. He perceived the Christian life as a fellowship between humans and God. He stressed that charity measured spirituality. Even though he was excellent in his scholastic work, he made a priority the life of prayer and meditation for mystical union with God. See Holt, *Thirst for God*, 106. For Thomas, knowing was experiential and connatural, “based on the union with God through charity and leading to the reception of the gift of divine wisdom.” See McGinn, *Harvest of Mysticism*, 35. Aquinas

Aquinas, Eckhart rooted his metaphysical thinking of mysticism in the Augustinian theological tradition.

Concepts like “the birth of God in the soul,” “distinction between God and the Godhead,” and God as “Nameless Nothing” were the core of Eckhart’s theology of highest union with God. Eckhart opined that apart from God as persons, the unknown Godhead was the ground of God and eternal unity. The divine spark of the soul was the foundation of the human’s union with God. Also, the self was absorbed into God in union with God. Meanwhile, the soul should undergo purification by practicing ascetic detachment, silence or withdrawal, forgetting ideas and concepts, and not loving the created.<sup>140</sup> Several of these perspectives were controversial from the perspectives of contemporary orthodox theology. The archbishop of Cologne, who condemned mystical speculation as heretical, opposed Eckhart and put his twenty-eight articles in the list of the bull. Thus, Eckhart’s works became suspicious until the nineteenth century when German Romantics and Idealist philosophers rediscovered them.<sup>141</sup>

Suso and Tauler were students of Eckhart. They possibly encountered Eckhart when they were in the Dominican *Studium Generale* in Cologne. Suso was born in Heinrich von Berg. He was admitted to a monastery of the Dominican Order at the age of thirteen. He was an extreme ascetic in imitating Christ’s suffering. Moreover, his tender personality demonstrated the love of God. He opined that a truly “self-abandoned man” was dead to oneself, entirely lost in God, and became one with God. However, unlike

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noted that negative theology was a corrective to affirmation theology. The finite knowledge of God had to be constantly challenged and replaced by the knowing acquired through negation. See Lossky, *Eastern Church*, 25, 27–30.

<sup>140</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 53.

<sup>141</sup> McGinn, *Harvest of Mysticism*, 94. The Roman Catholic Church lifted the censure on some of Eckhart’s works in 1980.

Eckhart, he made the distinction between the devotees' becoming one with God and Christ's becoming one with God. He also acknowledged the difference between the union with God on earth and the ultimate union with God in heaven. Moreover, Suso's visionary experience made him certain of the ultimate reality. He stressed that the meditation on Christ's passion and Christ's humanity, especially his suffering and his death, was the way to know God and love God. He used Eckhart's term of "breakthrough" and emphasized that to make a breakthrough to the ground of the Trinity, the devotees needed to be conformed to the suffering Christ.<sup>142</sup> Many readers in the fourteenth and fifteenth century admired Suso's works.

Tauler contributed to mysticism by making Eckhart's thought and terminology closer to the ordinary Christian life. He came from Strasbourg and entered the Dominican order at the age of about eighteen. He gained popularity and reputation through meeting many people and devoting himself to the care of the sick during the Black Death in 1348. Tauler emphasized that God dwelled in the soul. However, he did not highlight that the nature between the creature and the Creator became identical through the union, thus avoided the controversy. Nevertheless, he still upheld the concept of "uncreated ground of the soul" and the necessity of passivity for God's work in the soul. His notion that suffering could be God's work may refer to the similar experience that St John of the Cross called "dark night of the soul," as Ursula King opines. Luther had shown his concerns on Tauler's essential mystical teachings. However, he appreciated Tauler that he stressed the role of grace and the work of the Holy Spirit in mystical union. Luther also affirmed the spiritual guidance on practical matters presented in Tauler's sermons.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> McGinn, *Harvest of Mysticism*, 200, 217–20, 228–29, 234–35.

<sup>143</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 56–57.

John of Ruusbroec became a priest in 1318. He served in the church for many years but left its low spiritual environment to join *Groenendael* with Augustinian rules so he could live a contemplative life.<sup>144</sup> The main theme of John's books was the soul absorbed into the inner life of the Trinity through love. John noted that the divine image had the potential for deification. The created spirit could ascend to the uncreated God through the active, interior, and contemplative life, which were the three stages of the spiritual ladder. The seekers progressed to inward devotions of love toward God through the outward active life of goodness and virtue. Then the heart must sink into "imageless nudity" to attain the highest union with the Trinity. After being melted into the union, human beings would find that the vision ends, and they went back into the reason and the ordinary life without interrupting their union with God. Human beings lost themselves first in the abyss of God's love, then gained their identity again and never lost it.<sup>145</sup>

### *The Imitation of Christ*

Many scholars recognized that Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471) was the author of *The Imitation of Christ*. Thomas lived in an age when European people suffered from the Black Death, wars, political chaos, and church corruption. Since 1399, Thomas found refuge in a Roman Catholic pietist monastery.<sup>146</sup> The members of the Brethren of the Common Life established this monastery. They were committed to a simple life devoted to Jesus Christ. The monastery life included labour works, charity, studying the Scripture, and copying religious literature.

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<sup>144</sup> *Groenendael* initiated a spiritual reform and influenced Luther and Thomas à Kempis.

<sup>145</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 58–59.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, xlii–xliii. Thomas was born in Kempen. His surname was Hemerken.

Thomas regarded Jesus Christ as the most beloved spouse of the devotees, who desired to be “completely absorbed in [him] that for love of [him, they] shall not be conscious of [themselves] but of [him] alone.”<sup>147</sup> However, Thomas realized that to acquire such unique contemplation, the devotees should have true freedom to rest in God.<sup>148</sup> He noted that the way of freedom was the way of perfection that the devotees gave up all their desires and committed to Christ alone. To find God, they should detach themselves from the created things, including signs and feelings.<sup>149</sup> *The Imitation of Christ* manifested the incompatibility between the desire for God and the desire for the world. Whereas, it did not mean the incompatibility between the world and God who loved the world and sacrificed Jesus for it. William Creasy perceived that the book demonstrated Thomas’ spirit of living in the world and loving the world for God’s sake instead of for self-centeredness.<sup>150</sup> However, one may wonder how Thomas, who seldom stepped outside the monastery, would understand living in the world but out of the world well.

Thomas also exhorted the devotees on how to face their spiritual dryness. He noted that when they could not fully devote themselves to the spiritual life and divine contemplation because of original sin’s corruption and the burden of the world, they should “take refuge in humble, outward tasks and to refresh themselves in good works.”<sup>151</sup> However, they would restore their spiritual passion only when Jesus came to the devotees and free them from all their worries, then Jesus “shall spread open before

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<sup>147</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 79.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 78–79.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 90–92.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, xli.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 113–14.

[them] the pleasant fields of holy Scriptures, so that with open heart [, they] may begin to run in the way of [the] commandments.”<sup>152</sup>

*The Imitation of Christ* is one of the most recommended classics by evangelical leaders. The core reason is that it upheld a pattern of life radically following Jesus’s example, particularly referred to as the way of the cross, including self-denial, contempt of the world, and suffering for God’s will.<sup>153</sup> It concerned not only inner life (Book II; Book III Chapter 1) but also outward expression (Book III Chapter 10), which demanded both the intellect theology of Christ (Book III Chapter 4) and the affective devotion to Christ (Book III Chapter 6). However, the necessity of the virtue that was pleasing to God was the primary theme of the book; thus, the readers may misunderstand that it advised them to despise the role of intellect in theology.<sup>154</sup>

Some evangelicals also resonant with Thomas’ perspective that when the devotees progressed in their spiritual life, they would become more aware of the struggle from their sinful nature and the vanity of the world.<sup>155</sup> Thomas reminded the devotees to take the problem of sin seriously. They should purify their sins in this life so that they would be less worried at the Day of Judgement.<sup>156</sup> That did not imply that Thomas perceived that the sinners could purify themselves of their sin, because Thomas pleaded that Jesus forgave his sin and saved his soul, which Jesus had ransomed with his precious blood. Only Jesus could set him free from sin, protect, and lead him to eternal life.<sup>157</sup> However, Thomas held that purgatory was a place for the purification of the deceased before they

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 114.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 74–76. See the comment of Demarest in Demarest, “Reading Catholic Spirituality,” 118.

<sup>154</sup> Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 105.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 3, 24.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 29.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 139, 144.

were fit to enter into heaven.<sup>158</sup> Thomas' belief was in tension with the evangelical conviction that Jesus' redemption was sufficient for the souls' salvation.

However, Thomas deemed Jesus as the sole and sufficient example of his life. The devotees should allow the crucified Jesus to enter their hearts that they could find everything they needed in Jesus.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, Thomas upheld his reliance on Jesus' grace. He said to Jesus, "how absolutely necessary is your grace for me, Lord, if I am to begin anything good, to continue on with it, and to see it through to the end. Without it, I can do nothing; with it strengthening me, I can do everything."<sup>160</sup> Jesus was the source of the freedom and peace of the soul. This has attracted many evangelicals.

### The Spanish Mystics

Three renowned Spanish mystics in the sixteenth century greatly influenced today's spirituality. They were Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), and John of the Cross (1542–1591). They rose in an era of colonialism and mercantilism that led to European expansion and imperialism throughout the world. Many of their contemporary theologians protested against the corrupted ecclesial institutional authorities and theology. The Spanish mystics realized the necessity of reformation of the church. However, they did not join the Protestants. Instead, they denounced the direction adopted by the Protestants. Meanwhile, they carried out reformation through advocating a profound union with God through both inner life and outward service of the world.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, their effective administration also strengthened their contribution made to

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<sup>158</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 69.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 31.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 120.

<sup>161</sup> McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain (1500–1650)*, 4–8.

the reformation. Besides, with new printing techniques, their instruction could reach a large population, including those inside and outside the monasteries.

Ignatius devoted himself to serving Christ after he experienced a profound conversion, having retreated from the army to recover from his wound. He studied theology at the University of Paris and founded the Society of Jesus. He wrote and constantly revised *The Spiritual Exercises* that facilitated spiritual renewal for many people. It was a result of four weeks' meditation on Christ's life and self-examination of sins with practical instructions, including the discernment of the spirits. The core characteristics of Ignatius' spirituality were practically conforming the human will to the divine will by imitating Christ and contemplation in action.<sup>162</sup> Many Christians, including Protestants, built upon Ignatius' exercises and gave practical instructions on the development of spiritual life.<sup>163</sup> Thus, Ignatius' spirituality and practices have a lasting influence on Christianity until now, especially on those who respond to God's calling, participating in education and mission organized by the Society of Jesus.

Teresa entered a Carmelite convent in Spain at the age of twenty and became a Carmelite leader, devoting herself to the inner contemplative life and the reformation of the Carmelite order, both of which were the expressions of her ardent love of God. Teresa's spirituality was influenced by that of the Jesuits, Franciscans, and St. John of the Cross.<sup>164</sup> Her work on prayer, *The Interior Castle*, was the most read book among her writings. Because of the lack of theological training, Teresa's writings demonstrated less theological elements but a more experiential exposition of the dynamic inner life, which

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<sup>162</sup> Demarest, "Reading Catholic Spirituality," 119.

<sup>163</sup> Many Protestant evangelicals in Hong Kong adapted the practices in *The Spiritual Exercises* to their context and used them during the spiritual retreats. See Ng, "Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises," 187.

<sup>164</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 73.

may be one of the reasons that they were widely read. Regarding the cataphatic and apophatic approach, Teresa's mysticism was more apophatic than that of Ignatius and more cataphatic than that of St. John of the Cross.

Teresa recorded her spiritual experience and journey in *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, which explained the details of how her prayer practices, especially her meditation on the life of Christ, were related to her mystical experience. She practiced the four stages of mental prayer and acquired what she called a sudden, passive experience of ecstasies. However, she disclosed that the mystical experience of God motivated and led her into the active service of God among people. The metaphoric language used to explain how the devotees and God played their roles, respectively, in the spiritual journey was very helpful. Employing the metaphor of watering in the garden, Teresa explained that usually the beginners of prayer took great efforts and experienced great struggles over the disciplines until God granted them the grace and the gifts, before which it was pleasing to God if the devotees spent time with God and expressed the intention to know and love him better.<sup>165</sup>

*The Interior Castle* was a more sophisticated work on the soul's practice of prayer on its journey to God. Seven mansions in the castle represented seven progressive stages of prayer life.<sup>166</sup> Teresa gave practical advice for distinguishing the pathological voices and imaginative visions from authentic experience. She was sure that along with the progressive prayer life, the transformation of life and the virtues increased.<sup>167</sup> The devotees entered the first mansion when they began to practice prayer. They began to

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<sup>165</sup> O' Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 97.

<sup>166</sup> Demarest, "Reading Catholic Spirituality," 118.

<sup>167</sup> Underhill holds a similar disposition that the right prayer will lead to the right concept about Reality. See Underhill, *Essentials*, 80.

think about the things of God, but they were also worldly, burdened with sins and excessive self-knowledge and prone to the temptation of Satan. The souls in the second mansion strived to break with the world and detach from the sensible consolations. They diligently sought solely God's will and found strength, warmth, and virtues in it even at the time of avidity. The souls in the third mansion shunned deliberate sins and lived an orderly routine of a righteous life. God may send the devotees the opportunities of suffering to prepare them for more grace of progress. Those who were too timid to accept the cross remained in the third or even retreated to the previous mansions. While those who allowed God's work proceeded to further union with God.<sup>168</sup>

From the fourth mansion onward, the souls began to experience mystical prayer or the infused contemplation, which was more God's grace than the strife of the souls. The prayer in the fourth mansion was the prayer of quiet. The souls rest in God, dealing with the problems of wandering mind by concentrating on God's will and practicing all virtues. Union of the will with God's will was essential at this stage. God gave the prayer of recollection out of his grace. The fifth stage was the prayer of union. The souls were at peace because of God's love at the same time restless because they had not fully possessed God yet. The union with God's will became durable and demonstrated mostly in the practice of the virtue of charity.<sup>169</sup>

The union in the sixth mansion was called *Spiritual Betrothal*. The souls were still engaged in building companionship with Christ. They also guarded against the possibility that the creatures stood between the souls and the Creator. The souls meditated on the humanity and divinity of Christ and had a profound understanding of requesting Christ's

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<sup>168</sup> O' Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 60–71.

<sup>169</sup> O' Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 72–84.

suffering. The union in the seventh mansion was called *Spiritual Marriage*. The souls had found the spring of peace and joy. They were able to take up the heavier cross and willing to lie down their life for others.<sup>170</sup> However, since they became more sensitive, they may feel more desperate or “*Lamma Sabacthani*” at the time of darkness. O’ Donoghue reminds us that the readers should not make a clear distinction between these rooms and mansions because some exhortations related to the experiences in their specific mansions may be beneficial to other experiences in other mansions.<sup>171</sup>

Teresa’s teachings on mental prayer and passive prayer of quiet and union were under the investigation of the Inquisition, who discredited her for many years. Somehow, unlike her mentor St. John of the Cross, she was kept from persecution.

John of the Cross was born at Fontiveros, near Ávila. He entered the Carmelite Order in 1563. He was well praised for his systematically and theologically structured poetry and commentaries on mysticism that radically expressed the ardent love for God and the eagerness to know the unknowing God. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night* guided the contemplative life journey of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages.<sup>172</sup> The first phase focused on reordering the affections away from the world toward God. The beginners started meditation but should not attach to consolation and satisfaction to prepare for faith in the passive night of the senses. The second phase focused on the formation of naked faith that the devotees must empty the natural

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<sup>170</sup> Some mystics had such experience of joy and suffering. Julian of Norwich (1342–1423), an English Benedictine, devoted to sharing the suffering of Christ and satisfied with the grace of the mutual dwelling of her soul and God. See Demarest, “Reading Catholic Spirituality,” 117. She based her work *Showings or Revelations of Divine Love* on her visions through which she gained ascertain truth and love of God toward the world that demanded the devotees to trust God. Julian did not become well known until the publication of her works in 1670. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 66. Therefore, Teresa may not know her work. However, they shared the similarity in the mystical experience of joy and peace, along with the suffering of Christ for the world.

<sup>171</sup> O’ Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 87–88.

<sup>172</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 167.

operations, including the intellect, memory, fantasy, and will, and allow the incomparable and incomprehensible God to fill them. The third phase was called spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage. During the spiritual betrothal, the souls awaiting the divine imprint, had to endure enormous pain at the time of God's absence, thus was driven deeper into themselves. Meanwhile, they enjoyed more divine communication involving the effect of incarnation and redemption. During the spiritual marriage, the deepened union of love transformed the souls into "God" by participation, which was not from a substantial perspective.<sup>173</sup>

John emphasized that his works were for those who were advanced in seeking God. He also highlighted that pure love in the highest contemplation was the most fruitful form of service that would bring the most benefit to the church.<sup>174</sup> Such perspective challenged the notion that contemplative life benefits others only if the individuals move out of contemplation and take actions to serve others.

John was known for his instruction in spiritual direction. He noted that what God revealed to directees, God would also reveal to their experienced spiritual directors if the divine communication reached its maturity, which would be full of satisfaction, peace, strength, light, and security. It could help to discern what God wanted from the directees. The spiritual directors facilitated to free the directees from meditation to dark, silent contemplation step by step. They should discern the signals of transition from meditation to infused contemplation and should not quench the God-given holy idleness.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 175–204. John said, "A man must strip himself of all creatures and of his actions and abilities [of his understanding, taste, and feeling] so that when everything unlike and unformed to God is cast out, his soul may receive the likeness of God." See John, *Collected Works*, 2:5.

<sup>174</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 186, 199. John also noted that if those who actively engaged in the service spent time on contemplation, their labour would bear more fruits.

<sup>175</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 185, 203–4. Ignatius noted that the role of spiritual directors was to discern God's will for their directees.

### The French Mystics

The works of Teresa of Ávila, Catherine of Genoa, and St. John of the Cross were translated into French, which brought about a mystical renaissance in France.<sup>176</sup> The major motives of French mysticism were the nature of spiritual life, prayer and contemplation, the role of grace, and the relationship between contemplation and social action. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1611–1691) and Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon, known as Madame Guyon (1648–1717), had a significant influence among Chinese Christians after their works were translated into Chinese around 1940. Their authentic life of pursuing God inspired many Chinese Christians, who followed their teachings because they were simple.

Brother Lawrence served as a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris. He was well known for his practice of being conscious of the presence of God amid the daily life, which was recorded in a book compiled after his death, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. He started his practices in his 50s.<sup>177</sup> He exhorted that the sense of God's presence did not need special knowledge or technique but a heart of trust and love for God alone on every occasion, including sufferings. However, he reminded us repeatedly that the devotees needed to recollect their wandering thoughts and concentrate on God. Even though it would be hard to do so, the spiritual journey would gradually become easier if they did not give up.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510), known as a “theologian of purgatory,” described the union with God in a language of “absorption” into God that her being was transformed into the being of God, a strong tone that “participation” was too light to describe. Her experience and theology of union with God were theo-centered instead of Christ-centered. As Eckhart, Catherine noted the necessity of the soul's purification on its journey to the full union with God. She devoted herself to purgatory in her marriage, care for plague victims, imperfect soul searching for salvation and purification, and nervous illness. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 42.

<sup>177</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 85.

<sup>178</sup> Lawrence, *Presence of God*, the eighth letter.

Lawrence became assured of his eternal life instead of his eternal perishment when he decided to love God in all the works of his life. Roman Catholics did not clearly emphasize the doctrinal truth that those who believed in Jesus had eternal life. Lawrence was aware of Jesus and his teachings because his favourite books were the four gospels. He decided to take up Jesus' yoke instead of the fame of the world. He forgot himself, heaven, and hell, but occupied his mind and heart with God. Regarding whether one deserved the favour of God at the Day of Judgment, Lawrence did not want to know the answer to avoid becoming the predator of pride. Instead, he abandoned himself to God, believing that God had granted him the best. Because Lawrence put his faith in God and devoted his love solely for God, he acquired the authentic hope that he was actually with God and would be in God after his life on earth.<sup>179</sup> The life of Lawrence brings evangelicals to question whether one can experience and own the truth of God without well-defined doctrinal convictions.

Madame Guyon was introduced to mysticism by Francois La Combe during her marriage. After the death of her husband, she developed her mystical vision of interior. Gaining Francois Fenelon's support, she became influential. She taught the way of inner prayer that prepared the devotees for union with God as a drop of water falling into the sea.<sup>180</sup> She exhorted the illiterate to meditate on a short Bible passage, particularly the

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<sup>179</sup> Lawrence, *The Character of Lawrence*, para. 24.

<sup>180</sup> Several women mystics expressed their loving communion with God, for example, Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210–1297), one known educated Beguine in Germany. She was encouraged to write down her experience of union with God. *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* was a series of poems celebrating the soul's loving communion with God as a bride with her bridegroom. This book also disclosed the corruption and suffering of the world that indicated the reality of the persecution that the Beguines suffered for poetic expression of their love with God. The Beguines were groups of pious women living in self-sufficient communities in various areas of Europe, following their spiritual vocation but with the spiritual guidance from a master or a mistress and with their fluid rule. The community provided care for the visitors, the seniors, the sick, and the poor. They were encouraged to write their experiential relationship with God in a poetic, lyrical way with erotic images. Their spirituality bore the tone of intensive love that knowledge was

Lord's Prayer, to allow the Word of God sinking into the heart.<sup>181</sup> Guyon's life manifested her core teachings, including submission to God's will and detachment from the world, even the mystical visions and ecstasy.<sup>182</sup>

Guyon's perspective of the inward journey was progressive, according to Stephen Kaung, a co-worker of Watchman Nee. During the first stage, God drew the devotees to him with divine joy and led them for spiritual growth. During the second stage, God led them to grow further by taking away material things. While during the third stage, God inspired them to move further with his pure love that fuelled their heart and compelled them to rush toward God.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, the impression of the devotees at the first stage regarding their spiritual experience was joyfulness. Then the main theme of the second stage was abundant spiritual gain with the price of struggling and loss. Finally, the core motif at the third stage was mutual love between God and the devotees. Furthermore, Guyon perceived that God worked for spiritual growth. Meanwhile, her works manifested that it was simple for the devotees to assess their spiritual status and participate in God's work during their spiritual journey.

One of the concerns from some conservative evangelicals was Guyon's Roman Catholic background. For example, Guyon regarded worshipping Mary and penitence before priests as acts of piety. These conservative evangelicals tended to read Guyon's works in her Roman Catholic background while analyzing it against their fundamental convictions. For example, Guyon pinned Jesus' name in her skin to show her intention

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less emphasized. Some stressed the liberation, abandonment, and "annihilation" of the soul before God. Some texts indicated the loss of individual identity because of merging into God's love. The radical expression of the love relationship with God had brought about the persecution of the church authorities. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 42–45. They shared some similarities with Guyon, such as being absorbed into God, caring for the poor, and suffering the persecution.

<sup>181</sup> Guyon, *Inner Prayer*, chapter 3.

<sup>182</sup> Guyon, *Moyao*, chapters 16, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Kaung, *Songs of Degrees*, xxiv.

that she wanted to remember Jesus' name in her heart. However, some evangelicals interpreted her act as ascetic practices that did not affect spiritual benefit (Col 2:23).<sup>184</sup> Some Chinese evangelicals did not regard Guyon as an authentic Christian because she lacked the evidence of putting faith in Christ alone. Therefore, they concluded that Guyon's experience of union with God did not come from God.

However, Guyon became the spiritual model of holiness among many Chinese Christians, including evangelicals. She was the victim of persecution from the Roman Catholic Church, which gained sympathy among many Chinese evangelicals. Guyon pursued a purified life for Christ among her family members and in the community amid sufferings, which had encouraged many Chinese evangelicals, who lived in challenging situations, to focus on God. Whereas, we have to remember the fear among some evangelicals that promoting the spiritual booklets would replace the reading of the Scripture and upholding the experience of these spiritual figures would imply the rejection of Jesus and his cross. Therefore, emphasizing the essential place of the Scripture and Jesus Christ would relieve the doubt when we approach Guyon's spiritual resources.

Having presented the main stream of Christian mysticism, I now turn to give a brief introduction of the Eastern Orthodox mysticism for a more comprehensive understanding of mystical spirituality. Then I will present the main characteristics of Christian mysticism and briefly explore their relation to the early Chinese evangelicals.

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<sup>184</sup> Guyon, *Moyao*, chapter 3.

### Eastern Orthodox Mysticism

The theology of Eastern Orthodox Church is mystical, according to Vladimir Lossky.<sup>185</sup>

The core figures contributing to the Eastern Church's mysticism are the Cappadocian Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologians (949–1022), and Gregory Palamas (1296–1357 or 1359). While I have already outlined the Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius, it is instructive to pay special attention to the Eastern branch of the church and its traditions of mysticism. The Cappadocian Fathers developed Trinitarian theology and established the foundations of Eastern Orthodox Trinitarian theology. Maximus was the student of Dionysus. Symeon and Palamas were intellectual heirs to Maximus. They emphasized deification and held that humans could become divine as God became human in Christ's incarnation. They also believed that humans could enjoy full union with God as manifested in Christ's incarnation.

John Anthony McGuckin notes that Lossky's neo-patristic theology claimed that Eastern Orthodox spirituality, i.e. a form of mystical spirituality, provided a corrective of serial divorces found in western Christianity, such as the separation of ecclesial doctrine and mystical experiences of God, and the divorce of cataphasis from apophasis.<sup>186</sup>

McGuckin says, "[T]he ascetical Byzantine writers do not speak so much of a crucifixion of the intellect, but rather of its progressive purification and constant amplification."<sup>187</sup>

The Eastern Church presented the value of Christian mysticism, even though mystical spirituality did not exist as a core trend in the history of the Western Church, most of the

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<sup>185</sup> Lossky, *Eastern Church*, 8.

<sup>186</sup> McGuckin, "Eastern Church," 383–84. As Aquinas, Lossky upheld that apophasis was a corrective to cataphasis.

<sup>187</sup> McGuckin, "Eastern Church," 395.

time even marginalized by the Western Church. The revival of Christian mysticism can benefit from introducing Eastern Church spirituality to the world, including Chinese evangelicals.

McGuckin summarizes Lossky's perception that "Palamas understood the transcendent Godhead reaching out to the world through his energies so that though his essence remains incomprehensible to all creatures, his hypostasis is immanent to those who know him. Deification (*theosis*) is thus the fundamental shorthand for the Orthodox sense of salvific redemption."<sup>188</sup> McGuckin also notes that "[t]he centrality of *theosis* as the primary metaphor of the redemption, allied to a Neo-Palamite understanding of the essence and energies, and routed through a hesychastic lens, has grown out of Lossky's thesis to become very constitutive of many parts of Orthodox self-expression today."<sup>189</sup>

The core characteristic of *Hesychasm* was the combination of mind and heart in prayer and the so-called prayer of the mind in the heart since the fourteenth century. It developed *The Jesus Prayer* to achieve inner stillness (*hesychia*) to deal with the problems caused by the discursive thinking of the mind for the goal of unmediated union. *The Jesus Prayer* repeated invocation to Jesus that "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."<sup>190</sup> Symeon the New Theologian in the eleventh century developed the method of *hesychasm*, promoted through *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a work by a Russian layperson in the nineteenth century. The repetition of *The Jesus Prayer* would sink the belief of Jesus's incarnation and salvation into the heart.

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<sup>188</sup> McGuckin, "Eastern Church," 387. Alexandra Chow understands deification in Eastern Orthodox as "not merely the task of uniting an individual with God but empowering the individual to fulfill the God-given responsibility as mediator," which "means a continual participation with the divine works in this world to bring harmony where divisions once prevailed." See Chow, *Theosis*, 148.

<sup>189</sup> McGuckin, "Eastern Church," 387.

<sup>190</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 95–96.

The Eastern Orthodox mystics were ascetic and relied on the power of love for perfection and union with God. The divination/deification was both redemption and union with God, indicating the detachment from all created things. The love of others indicated how much the devotees were free from the attachment to the desires. It also demonstrated how much they acquired the illumination from the divine light. Eastern Orthodox spirituality followed the pattern of the spiritual journey: an active life with a purity of heart and without passion, seeing God in all things and all things in God, and “the contemplation of God face to face, in an unmediated union of love.”<sup>191</sup>

## **2. Main Characteristics of Christian Mysticism and Their Relation to the Early Chinese Evangelicalism**

As a result of this historical survey of Christian mysticism I want to summarize the following main characteristics of mystical spirituality. These seven motifs frequently appear in the works of many mystical theologians. However, it does not mean that every mystical theologian presents all of these motifs. Individual theologians have their foci. This section attempts to bring the patterns of their foci into a picture that presents a vision of the mystical tradition.

Furthermore, I will explore some of these core motives emerging within the development of early Chinese Christian spirituality, particularly in the spiritual theology of Watchman Nee. Christian mysticism had affected early Chinese Evangelical spirituality through literature, such as those belonging to Jessie Pen-Lewis, Madame Guyon, and Brother Lawrence. Chinese evangelicals came to know their mystical

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<sup>191</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 95.

thoughts through the Keswick movement.<sup>192</sup> These mystical works had contributed to the promotion of holiness and piety in the Keswick movement. The evangelical leaders for generations had critically passed on the mystical literature, including its beliefs and practice.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Keswick started with three-day gatherings in Keswick in 1875 to promote practical holiness. Then it developed into a loosely connected association of similar conventions, with the goal of the transformation of “ordinary Christians into effective members of the body of Christ.” See McAlpine, “Keswick Movement,” 558. M. R. Haddad refers the Keswick to the British branch of the Holiness Movement. He notes, “In essence, Keswick promoted a mystical Quietism that suggested that through faith and passivity the soul reached the highest mystical state—union.” Keswick avoided the language and concepts of purgation. However, the experiential reality showed that the evangelicals had to undergo similar purification from the habitual sins of self-centeredness. Penn-Lewis called this experience the results of being crucified with Christ or the death with Christ, which was part of cross theology. Haddad notes that Penn-Lewis perceived that overcoming the power of self was an active and organic union with Christ’s death by faith; thus, her cross theology was different from the passive rest of quietism. See Haddad, “Mystical Theology,” 28, 45, 86–89. Early Chinese evangelical leaders had a close connection with those western leaders who were participating in the Keswick movement. These western leaders recommended Christian literature promoted by the Keswick movement, including some mystical literature, to Chinese evangelical leaders. They also invited some Chinese evangelical leaders to participate in the Keswick movement.

<sup>193</sup> For example, Luther commented that Eckhart, Tauler, and *Theologia Germanica* had taught him a lot about God, Christ, and the human condition. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 69. Many Protestants doubted the works of those theologians who remained in the Roman Catholic churches, including some mystics. See McGinn, *Mysticism in the Reformation*, 5. The doubt arose when many Christians opposed the institutional churches and the corruption of the clergy. However, they desired a personal, spiritual, and direct relationship with God. Besides, they pursued an understanding of the Bible without the mediation of the Roman Catholic churches. They found that mystical spirituality, encouraging a direct relationship with God instead of the institutional churches, could meet some of their needs. Thus, they examined with caution the mystical literature and adapted what they thought was useful to their doctrine and their context. However, since the Protestant movement focused on salvation or justification by faith alone, they intentionally tuned down the diligent spiritual disciplines. Nevertheless, they picked them up when they attempted to enhance the superficial spirituality of their congregants. They accepted some mystical practices, such as a spiritual reading of the Bible and meditating on the Bible, relying on the Holy Spirit instead of the Roman Catholic church. Furthermore, some early prominent Protestants such as Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) and George Fox (1624–1691) experienced mystical visions or ecstasies that confirmed the possibility of searching for heavenly wisdom from their interior lives. They clung to the teachings and the operation of traditional churches. Therefore, they were more receptive to traditional mystical spirituality. They rejected mystical perspectives that searched for a union of absorption without the distinction between human and divine, upheld spiritual disciplines as a meritorious precondition for salvation that ignored grace, stressed monastery lifestyle, and neglected faith. Nevertheless, they sought to attain an ideal Christian life through disciplined practices similar to mystical spirituality. Their teaching, such as Boehme’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, continued to influence emerging evangelicals such as William Law (1686–1761), John Wesley (1703–1791), and the Puritans, Pietists, and Pentecostals. See King, *Christian Mystics*, 69, 87–93. The evangelical Puritans expressed mystical spirituality in such phrases as “the grateful and loving beholding of God through God’s mighty acts and Scripture, in which one experiences union and deepening communion with Jesus Christ through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.” See Schwanda, *Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism*, 26. To confront the notion of the necessity of believing in pure doctrine alone, some Pietists drew upon the work of mysticism, including Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure, Suso, Tauler, Ruusbroec, and *Theologia Germanica*, to explain the

First, the pursuit of being highly conscious of the presence or absence of God. For example, even though Lawrence's perspective is simple, he presents clearly that he intends to seek a consciousness of God's presence. Underhill notes that a sensitive consciousness of one's soul accompanied the overwhelming consciousness of God.<sup>194</sup> The consciousness of psychological phenomena and mystical experiences implies that the devotees know that something arises from these phenomena and experiences. They know it in both intellectual and affective ways, even though they cannot describe it clearly to communicate it to others. In a word, knowing God's presence is more than the consciousness of mystical experiences through which the devotees believe that God presences among them and interacts with them.

Early Chinese evangelicals were familiar with the term of the presence of God. Brother Lawrence's *The Presence of God* was translated into Chinese around 1940 by Chenghua Yu, a member of *The Little Flock*. Chinese evangelicals understand from Lawrence's life example that his concept of the presence of God is being conscious of God's works and following his steps closely. This booklet had attracted many grassroots Chinese evangelicals to practice collecting their thoughts and focus their attention on God. They pursued the presence of God both when they were in quiet time and when they actively engaged in all kinds of evangelism and building up the churches. Since Brother Lawrence exhorted the possibility of being conscious of God during one's daily

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spiritual experiences that were rooted in union with Christ to glorify God through life transformation. See Erb, *Pietists, Protestants, and Mysticism*, 158. Ernest Stoeffler demonstrates the characteristics of Pietism, which shows the similarities and differences between Pietistic spirituality and mystical spirituality. See Stoeffler, *Pietism*, ix. Recently, Daniel Castelo argues that Pentecostalism is a Christian mystical tradition. He parallels Pentecostal spirituality with mystical spirituality, using the three-stage frame. Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition*, 77–81. Philip Jenkins affirms that Pentecostal churches preach both mysticism and puritanism, but they have their foundation on scriptural spirituality. See Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 8.

<sup>194</sup> Underhill, *Essentials*, 9.

responsibility, Chinese evangelicals welcome his practice of the high consciousness of the presence of God.

The second characteristic is the ardent desire to have a close relationship with God, the degree of which can be described as “full union,” “highest,” “absorption,” “dwell in all,” and “dwell at the center.” Devotees may feel the intimacy with God when they turn to nature and the world to see God or see God in all and see all in God. They may also turn inward to find God dwelling in them and them abiding in God. Underhill notes that “union with God” in mystical spirituality demonstrates the power to redirect or kill all lesser relationships that the relationship with God becomes the sole goal and the reality. It purifies the devotees and prepares them for seeing God.<sup>195</sup> Some devotees feel that they seem to lose their identity at the transient moment of union. While some devotees feel the enormous gap between the creature and the Creator that they are nothing before God. On the one hand, they desire identification with God that makes them feel absorbed into God; on the other hand, the real-life after the ecstatic experience makes them realize that God is still beyond their reach. Therefore, some mystics, such as Dionysius, Eckhart, and St John of the Cross, dialectically speculate from the devotees’ perspective that God is Nothing or Unknown or Darkness, comparing to the creatures as things in the light that can be known.

Early Chinese evangelicals understood through Madame Guyon's literature that a close relationship with God was like a water drop lost in the sea. However, the Chinese perspective of union with God was different from that of the Catholic mystics. Nee believed that the communion with God started with the union with Christ when the devotees put their faith in Christ. Furthermore, he noted that the objective reality of union

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<sup>195</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 91–92.

was a historical event when Jesus died on the cross, and believers would experience the subjective reality of union through daily bearing the cross and following Jesus. The objective reality of union was the foundation and the guarantee of the subjective experience of union. Nee perceived that spiritual death with Christ to be a historical fact and the spiritual resurrection with Christ a daily experience in the midst of pursuing the union with Christ. Thus, the full degree of relationship with God was a full actualization of the historical union with Christ, which was the fullness of salvation on earth. Therefore, the language of a close relationship with God did not describe the subjective feeling of intimacy but manifested the effect of salvation. However, consistent with Christian mysticism, the actualization of the historical union with Christ through denying oneself demonstrated that the intimacy with God became the devotees' goal and the power for the daily taking up the cross.

Third, attaining full union with God is a journey that devotees should embark on. Many mystics describe this journey as progressive. They build the map of this journey according to Pseudo-Dionysius' pattern: purification, illumination, and union. We should note that incarnation is the foundation of this journey of union with God. Some mystics may not explicitly state that Christ dwells in the devotees through the Holy Spirit when they analyze this three-pattern journey. However, their mystical theology implies the indwelling of Christ. For example, in Gregory of Nazianzus' works, he says that the Holy Spirit actualizes the divinization of Christ in souls, which cannot be accomplished without the indwelling Christ. Furthermore, while three stages may share some similar experiences, each has its own prominent and sustaining or habitual characters. Moreover, the life of prayer is essential to progress forward, inward, or upward. Teresa believed that

this journey, to some extent, was parallel to the progress of the prayer life.<sup>196</sup> However, at any point in the journey, the devotees always need loving attention toward God for moving forward. Furthermore, the devotees show increasingly ardent love and obedience to God along these stages.

Chinese evangelicals' concept of union with God emphasized the union of the human will with God's will. Nee's book *The Spiritual Man* elaborated on the process of union with God from a psychological perspective.<sup>197</sup> Influenced by Penn-Lewis, Nee emphasized overcoming sin and temptation through cross and faith. Denying oneself and bearing the cross was the way to resist the power of sin and temptation. However, Nee also emphasized the experience of illumination when God revealed the spiritual truth through his Words.<sup>198</sup> Therefore, purification and illumination appeared to intertwine with each other in Chinese evangelicals' spiritual description instead of becoming the terms for spiritual stages.

Fourth, the integration of the cataphatic approach and the apophatic approach for the practical walk through the journey of union with God. The cataphatic approach builds upon the perspective that the devotees can know God in some ways, since God reveals himself through the Word and Christ. However, the mystics realized that the

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<sup>196</sup> Teresa, *Interior Castle*, 22.

<sup>197</sup> Nee adopted a trichotomous approach to anthropology: the spirit, the soul, and the body. He noted that union with God was a process of conformation to God: the spirit first conformed to the Holy Spirit, then the will, the mind, and the emotion conformed to the spirit and the Spirit. He noted that the union of a believer with God occurred in the spirit, i.e. the union of the spirit with the Holy Spirit. Nee's trichotomous approach was criticized by some scholars, even though he was not the first theologian who adopted this approach. See Lam, *Shuling Shenxue*, 282.

<sup>198</sup> Nee also used the word revelation to talk about the experience of illumination. He referred revelation to God's Word becoming alive to a person in a particular situation/context. He believed that it was the initial work of the Holy Spirit to reveal God's message to that person. Some Chinese evangelicals misunderstood that Nee attempted to replace the revelation of the Bible with illumination. Dongsheng Wu clarifies that Nee used the term revelation to stress the divine role of the experience or the fact of what happened, while the term illumination emphasizing the human role of the same event or the effect of what happened. See Wu, *Understanding*, 90.

understanding and description of God is limited in presenting the wholeness of God. Furthermore, the revelation is not static and complete but it increases and is updated along the spiritual journey. Thus, besides what is known, an unlimited realm is still unknown to the devotees. Therefore, on the one hand, devotees claim that they have known God in some ways; on the other hand, they realize that to know God more, they have to disown what they have known and move into the unknown to make it known. Thus, to know God more is based on what the devotees have already known. As Dionysius notes, negation is not the opposite of affirmation but beyond affirmation. Therefore, the spiritual journey does not include those who have not yet started knowing God.

During this constant journey of moving from known to unknown, detachment is essential. Devotees practice detachment, aiming to be set free from anything that hinders them from full union with God. The ultimate goal of the devotees is God. Anything other than God, including mystical experiences, intellect, love, and even grace from God, would hinder their journey toward God. The detachment from these things is to make sure that they have no power to hinder the devotees to know God more. That explains why, for some mystics, being abandoned by God's love is another necessity and divine-given experience to be closer to God. Therefore, in the language of the mystics, the devotees should ultimately forsake their intellect, memory, and will, which many people cannot understand and accept if they do not put this perception in the whole picture of mysticism.

Nee noted that illumination as a way of knowing God's truth was essential for life transformation because when the Holy Spirit revealed to devotees the meaning of God's

Word, they acquired the spiritual reality of the power of God's Word.<sup>199</sup> Nee's illumination connoted that devotees presented their posture of unknowing and humility before God and opened themselves up to receive God's revelation. Some Chinese evangelicals perceived Nee's illumination connoted a passivity of the mind in understanding God's Word; thus, they regarded him anti-intellectual. However, Nee did not discard the use of the mind in reading the Bible.<sup>200</sup> He admonished that the mind should be active in receiving God's revelation, and believers with a passive mind would easily fall into deception.<sup>201</sup> He realized through his mystical experience that there was a significant distinction between the power of the mental exercise of God's Word and the power of illumination of God's Word.

Besides, Nee advocated an active pursuit of knowing and obeying God's will. He also admonished that devotees should surrender their decisions to God even after they thought that they had known God's will. Such a posture was one of the manifestations of mystical apophaticism. Therefore, Nee demonstrated both cataphatic and apophatic ways of knowing God.

Chinese evangelicals practiced detachment in several ways even though they did not use the language of mystical theology. One can observe that Nee's illumination connoted a sense of detachment from what the devotees knew about God.<sup>202</sup> The simple life of Chinese evangelicals was also a manifestation of the practice of detachment.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Lam, *Shuling Shenxue*, 287.

<sup>200</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 155.

<sup>201</sup> Nee noted that it was necessary to discern the sources of our thoughts to make sure that they were pleasing to God. See Smith, "Discernment of Spirits," 100. Penn-Lewis's discernment focused more on the preternatural realms.

<sup>202</sup> Lam, *Shuling Shenxue*, 286–87.

<sup>203</sup> The advocacy of living a simple life as a spiritual discipline was different from the asceticism of mystical traditions. It was a demonstration of a life dead to the world. While according to Underhill, the original meaning of asceticism was a gymnastic of the soul through the education of self-denial and

The restraint from materials demonstrated the effect of being dead to sin and the world through the cross, a heritage from the Keswick movement. Furthermore, Nee also emphasized a detachment from mystical experience because these experiences would make the devotees arrogant and fall into temptation. Moreover, Nee's spiritual theology was distinctive in separating the spirit from the soul through the cross and God's Word.<sup>204</sup> When the Holy Spirit set the spirit free from the soul's control, he accelerated the process of the conformation of the spirit, which demonstrated the role of detachment in the union with God.

Fifth, the integration of contemplation and action, knowing God and loving God, or mind and heart. At the time of the Patristic fathers, knowing God is not separated from affection.<sup>205</sup> Without loving God, one cannot know God. Thus, in Augustine's theology, the language related to "mind" does not exclude affection. Contemplation is not only mental activity but also a heart exercise. John of the Cross also notes that contemplation itself is loving and serving the Lord and bears fruit by itself.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, the reason for the tension between contemplation and activity is not that contemplation does not show love, while activity includes actions of love. Whereas for many people, contemplation is a prayer in solitude, thus they feel the tension between engaging in contemplation and actively serving the world at the same time. However, Gregory of Nyssa notes the possibility of practicing the discipline of the desert internally for the contemplation of God. Meanwhile, Brother Lawrence shows that an active life could be contemplative.

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endurance to avoid hedonism. See Under, *Essentials*, 23. The implication of self-denial may not be equivalent to the self-denial proclaimed by Jesus, who teaches people to turn away from self to God.

<sup>204</sup> The discipline of the cross referred to Jesus' teaching on bearing the cross daily and denying oneself.

<sup>205</sup> At the time of Enlightenment, the study of theology gradually became the exercise of intellect and reason.

<sup>206</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 186, 199. See also Astell and Cavadini, "Song of Songs," 34.

Furthermore, many mystics note that an authentic contemplative life leads to the active service of the world, as in Teresa's instruction.<sup>207</sup> In a word, even though many mystics put more emphasis on contemplation, especially those who earnestly desire for union with God, they realize that active service in the world is an essential way to follow God.

The pious life led by Chinese evangelicals showed that they did not separate their belief and their doing. They showed their love for God through obeying God's will, even though many of them might be sophisticated in affective expressions because of their Chinese traditions. In a word, they communicated their love with God more through doing than emotional expressions. Furthermore, when they emphasized union of will between devotees and God, they exhorted knowing God's will through prayer and illumination. Therefore, knowing, contemplation, loving, and doing were united when they pursued union with God.

The sixth characteristic is upholding the role of God's grace for the journey. A remarkable perception is a divine element in human beings that the mystics regard as the foundation for the relationship between God and his devotees. The mystics call it "ground," "spark," "center" of the soul, inner light, or divine image. Furthermore, many mystics hold that God grants his grace to lead devotees into the experience of miracles and feed them with illuminated wisdom and transformation, even though they realize that the devotees should diligently practice asceticism and charity to discipline their selfish passion. Overall, they are humble to note that all is God's grace. Even suffering can

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<sup>207</sup> Astell and Cavadini, "Song of Songs," 34. The mystics can acquire the ecstatic, unitive state of prayer while remaining actively attentive to the neighbours.

become God's work to lead the devotees into the divine realm that are unknown to them.<sup>208</sup>

Chinese evangelicals influenced by Keswick went further than classical mysticism in emphasizing the role of the divine grace in the union between devotees and God. Not only advocating saved solely by grace, but Keswick also exhorted a decision of "rest" through faith in Christ, which denied the contribution of any human effort in union with God. Hence, it avoided the controversy over whether the devotees should make the human effort to prepare for God's work, including the spiritual disciplines. Exhorting the separation of the spirit and the soul, Nee upheld that it was the work of the Holy Spirit through the cross and illumination of God's Word. Nee perceived that human effort did not affect the death of self-desire, which Christ had accomplished on the cross. The Holy Spirit dealt with the believers in many things, such as their desire for food and clothing, undisciplined thought, abnormal emotion, and a stubborn will.

Seventh, Christ-centered or theo-centered characteristics.<sup>209</sup> The core of Christian mysticism is union with God. Thus, God is the center of mystical spirituality. The mystical theologians demonstrate this motif with various characteristics and different emphases. Some theologians, for example, Augustine, emphasize the Trinity or Godhead, thus demonstrate theo-centered characteristics. Some mystics emphasize Christ's incarnation, the imitation of Christ, or meditation on Christ's life, thus Christ appears to be the center of their theology.

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<sup>208</sup> However, Penn-Lewis noted that suffering may be inflicted directly by the evil spirit which should be resisted. The devotees should ask God for discernment to clear up the confusion. See Penn-Lewis, *Life out of Death*, 51–52.

<sup>209</sup> McGinn critiques that the form of mysticism as a "union of identity with God through purely contemplative practice, especially one that bypasses the mediatorial role of Christ and the place of scripture and the community" rarely existed in Christianity. See McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 65–66.

Early Chinese evangelical spirituality was particularly Christ-centered and God-centered. The legacy of Keswick was identifying with Christ's passion, which provided spiritual power for early Chinese evangelicals to endure suffering for their faith in Christ. Nee had demonstrated his life as wanting nothing for himself and wanting everything for the Lord. Even though early Chinese evangelical spirituality presented the union with God from a different angle, the legacy of union with Christ and conformity to the Spirit builds the common ground for contemporary Chinese evangelicals to appropriate the resources provided by Christian mysticism. Furthermore, since the focal point of mystical spirituality was the union of believers with God during the spiritual journey, it would lend strength, both theoretically and practically, to contemporary Chinese evangelicals to strike forward in the transformation for serving Christ in the world.

### CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY

Contemporary Chinese Evangelicals are living in a country where the CCP governs with absolute power, the economy grows fast, and the people pursue wealth and a modern lifestyle.<sup>1</sup> During the process of pursuing economic development, there was a time that the CCP loosened the promotion of communist ideology among Chinese people, even the CCP members. Without the affirmed guidance of communist ideology, many people opened their hearts searching for transcendent solutions for their bewildered and uncertain life goals, amid anxiety over the conflict between material-oriented life and morality-oriented life. Christianity, Buddhism, Daoism, and regional cults began to flourish.<sup>2</sup> As Christianity reveals the One Creator and Savior with justice and mercy, promises eternal life, educates the cultivation of virtues, and projects a vision of replacing this chaotic world with a world of peace, joy, and love, it attracts many who want to explore the journey of Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, "Update," 277.

<sup>2</sup> Some Chinese find comfort in Confucian and Taoist culture besides Christianity. See Xu, "Spiritual Crisis," 38, 39, and 45. The state-supported Confucianism stresses Chinese culture of submission and traditional virtues instead of supernatural or transcendental aspects.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, "Update," 278. A hot topic relating to Chinese Christianity is the number of Chinese Protestants. Shijun Dong and Zhongyu Liu from East China Normal University conducted a sample survey in 2005 and concluded with forty million. According to the government statistics, it was ten million in 2008, while the TSPM disclosed the number to be twenty million. The sample survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2010 showed it to be twenty-three million and fifty thousand. This data did not include the unregistered churches. Jianrong Yu, a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, based on his fieldwork from 2007 to 2008 on the unregistered churches of about twenty provinces, estimated the number of the members of the unregistered churches to be forty-five million to sixty million. Thus, the total number of Protestants reached around seventy million. The Purdue survey shown in 2010 by the Center on Religion and Chinese Society disclosed the number of thirty million. Tony Lambert, a British

However, recently, the CCP has strengthened the education of communist ideology among people of the whole nation, connecting the pursuit of communist ideology with nationalism and patriotism.<sup>4</sup> The CCP legitimizes its effort to sinicize Christianity in China for the benefit of the development of a socialist society because it holds that Chinese Christians should prioritize their citizenship responsibility over their Christian identity.<sup>5</sup> To control the propagation of ideology, the CCP only allows the distribution of Christian literature published by those organizations that it approves, usually the presses of the universities, the TSMP, the CCC, and the Religious Affairs Bureau.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the government has claimed that Chinese Christianity has entered the post-denomination era since 1949.<sup>7</sup> It suppresses the intention to establish

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researcher, involved in the mission to Chinese, in his *China's Christian Million* published in 2006, estimated between thirty million to fifty million, including the members of the unregistered churches. David Aikman, a former American journalist in Beijing, claimed that Chinese Christians, including Roman Catholics, had reached eighty million in 2003. World Christian Database even gave an estimation of one hundred and ten million. Since there is no official record of the unregistered churches, and Chinese Protestants have a very uneven distribution in different regions, the conclusion provided by the fieldwork may be the number that is the closest to the reality. Therefore, it is safe to say that the number of Chinese Protestants in China has reached seventy million before 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The CCP may realize the urgency of suppressing the growth of Chinese Christianity because of the rapid growth of an uncensored relationship between the unregistered churches and foreign persons and organizations. Furthermore, many overseas voices are predicting that the rising Chinese Christianity would take up the responsibility for the change of Chinese society toward adopting a new democratic freedom system to replace the existing one. Moreover, the activities of some unregistered churches in the cities, asking for more space for religious freedom that challenges the Regulations on Religious Affairs, have attracted the public attention, both inside the country and abroad.

<sup>5</sup> The residents of many communities are requested to register their religious background. Moreover, the government is launching a movement to investigate any religious activities that involve overseas religious groups.

<sup>6</sup> The books published in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and overseas are not allowed to be distributed in Mainland China. Even though people can possess these books as personal property, carrying a large volume of books to pass through customs to enter Mainland China would catch attention and invoke an investigation. The government, when it is free to set hands on cleaning-up the illegal Christian publications, punishes those who are not compliant with the administration and confiscates these publications. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> The government adopts this approach as one of its strategies to eliminate the possible channels for foreign forces to manipulate Chinese affairs.

denominational identities.<sup>8</sup> One of the reasons lies in the tendency of conflict among denominations, which is against the government's expectation for every group in Chinese society to be in harmony. Furthermore, the government tries to avoid the possibility of any infiltration of hostile foreign forces that may come from the potential affiliation between the denominations in China and the parallel ones in western countries. Therefore, it builds Union Churches and Seminaries and puts them under the control of the TSPM.

Considering this economic, political, cultural, and religious context, this chapter is devoted to a description of contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality. Regarding the scope of Chinese evangelicals, the official religious bodies acknowledge that most Chinese Protestants are evangelical and charismatic, tending toward fundamentalism.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, many resources used in this dissertation can apply to both Chinese evangelicals and Chinese Protestants.<sup>10</sup>

This dissertation classifies Chinese evangelicals according to their worshipping communities because communal worship is an essential element of Chinese evangelical spirituality, where Chinese evangelicals expect to experience the presence of God. The congregation with whom individual Chinese evangelicals choose to worship together regularly has significantly influenced the formation of identity and spirituality. Before the

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<sup>8</sup> Fiedler, "Christianity Fever," 75. Some unregistered churches who claim to be Chinese Reformed Churches become the objects of close surveillance. In some provinces, they are labelled as heresies by the regional governments, treated like Falungong and Eastern Lightning. However, *The True Jesus Church*, *The Little Flock*, and *The Seventh Day Adventists* in some regions can retain their group identity so far.

<sup>9</sup> Fällman, "Hermeneutical Conflict," 51. Generally, some evangelicals are mature to discern the theological controversy between evangelicalism and liberalism, but many others need the guidance of these fully-fledged evangelicals.

<sup>10</sup> In the specific context with political-religious tension in China, the information of the up-to-date situation of Chinese churches mainly comes from the news-gathering agencies, the works provided by social scientists of China and abroad, and those involved in the religious movements. The news agencies do not provide objective, programmatic, and balanced analysis, and their narrative of the information is subjective to biased standing. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, xiii. This dissertation acknowledges the functional and reductional weakness of social works. The adoption of the interdisciplinary approach is an attempt to help those involved in religious beliefs to consider a broader understanding of their perspectives.

post-denomination era, Chinese evangelicals identified themselves with a particular denomination and their lineage and village. In the age of post-denominationalism, many Chinese evangelicals hold on to their identity as the worshippers of Jesus or the supreme God (*Shangdi* 上帝).<sup>11</sup> Since Chinese Christians first define their identity through the act of worshipping together, they, including Chinese evangelicals, attach themselves to the groups of people with whom they attend worship services, a larger Christian body beyond their immediate kinship and territorial boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, different groups of worshippers have their distinct characteristics in spirituality.

Generally, Chinese evangelicals would regard themselves as worshippers either attending the government-sanctioned churches or not.<sup>13</sup> For the latter, they further classify themselves as worshippers at traditional non-charismatic churches, traditional charismatic churches, and newly independent and open churches, or they claim that they are freelance Chinese evangelicals.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter presents the spirituality of these five groups of Chinese evangelicals and their core characteristics.<sup>15</sup> The main areas manifesting their particularities include reading the Bible, prayer, worship and hymns, communal life, and life to engage the world. Following the description of each group, I give a brief analysis of its connection

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<sup>11</sup> Lee, "Mapping Christian Networks," 72.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, "Mapping Christian Networks," 73. Some evangelicals may attend worship at both government-sanctioned churches and non-government-sanctioned churches. Most evangelicals decide which group they belong to and remain in the same group, even though they have to move from place to place because of work and living.

<sup>13</sup> Even though many evangelicals attend the government-sanctioned churches, they trust in Christ instead of the leaders who may be liberals or modernists.

<sup>14</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 73. Some non-government-sanctioned churches can get their place registered. However, in the context that the CCP strategically suppresses the growth of Chinese Christianity and controls its development, many regional governments do not approve the application of the churches to be registered unless they apply to join the TSMP and become government-sanctioned churches. Meanwhile, some government-sanctioned churches cannot get their new places registered for their expansion.

<sup>15</sup> These groups may share similar characteristics. I put one feature in one group because it appears to be more prominent in this group than in other groups.

with Christian mysticism, mainly related to seeking the presence of God.<sup>16</sup> Finally, this chapter provides a summary of the elements, which mirror mysticism, to search for the common ground that forms the basis for overall Chinese evangelicals to appropriate mysticism.

## 1. Chinese Evangelicals in Government-Sanctioned Churches

### The Immediate Context

Government-sanctioned churches expose themselves to the propaganda of the TSPM and the CCC. They are under the direct influence of Chinese Christian liberalism and the agenda of the government's religious policy that attempts to sinicize Christianity with Chinese characteristics, including socialist values and the socialist market economy.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese Christian liberals play down the transcendent elements of Christianity. For example, they perceive that loving God is equivalent to loving others, writing off their distinctions.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, they regard Christianity as a religion associated with

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<sup>16</sup> McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Contemporary Chinese liberals try to harmonize believers and nonbelievers, Christianity and science, and salvation and social progress. They believe that the grace of Christ's salvation is abundant that it not only sets humans free from the bondage of sin caused by Adam but also ultimately redeems the whole universe. Therefore, on the one hand, they confess the weakness of human beings; on the other hand, they believe that people are powerful enough to follow the example of Christ's love to do good to each other. Moreover, they hold that Christ's salvation is part of God's creation. Therefore, actively involving in social progress, including modernization, is an act of participation in God's creation. Thus, it is a divine act of salvation. See Luo, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Shi*, 824–28. Many liberals tend to equate social progress with salvation in Christ. The twelve socialist values are prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony from the national dimension, freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law from the social aspect, and patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship from the citizen's dimension. The socialist market economy refers to the Chinese model of economic development, pursuing profit maximization through a market economy with the predominance of public ownership and state-owned enterprises.

<sup>18</sup> It is under the influence of Guangxun Ding's theology. See Chapter 1 section 6. 1978–2018 in this dissertation for more historical and contextual information. Ding also stresses harmony by upholding "justification by love" and downplaying "justification by faith," thus ignoring the depravity of human beings that may lead to the advocacy of upgrading the character by human effort and the civilization of a society by social reformation.

western civilization and the source of science.<sup>19</sup> They try to avoid supernatural elements and tend to perceive them as the source of superstition. Furthermore, the communist ideology of “spiritualism” also misleads people to understand Christian spirituality without involving supernatural elements. When Chinese atheists talk about taking care of the “spiritual” needs, they refer to reading books and education, which is the equivalent opposite side of “materialism” such as eating, exercises, and housing. Therefore, Chinese evangelicals have to discern cautiously whether the teachings or practices of Chinese liberals involve the divinity of Christ, because they may proclaim Jesus as a “spiritual” guru, an excellent moral example, and a magnificent philosopher, without disclosing his ultimate identity as the divine Savior and the supreme Lord.

Government-sanctioned churches stress morality as Christian affiliation to the socialist values and witness to society for God through having a harmonious family and being good citizens, model bosses, and excellent employees.<sup>20</sup> From a liberal perspective, people can learn, practice, and improve these positive characteristics or qualities of life without divine intervention. In recent years, many churches have tried to change their image by improving 素质 (*suzhi*, the holistic quality) of their members, including the

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<sup>19</sup> Several factors contribute to Chinese Christian advocacy that Christianity is the source of science. A major one is that Chinese liberals tend to identify western Christianity with western nations where modern science had developed. A second factor is that they emphasize the contribution of western missionaries to the modernization of Chinese society, especially in the area of science. They try to put their place in the picture of Chinese modernization that Chinese people can understand and accept. A third factor is that on their apologetic agenda, they present to Chinese people that many prominent scientists in the history of modern science were Christians. They explain that biblical teaching inspires some scientific findings. Their purpose is to build up the congruency between Christianity and science. However, the tendency to identify Christianity with science makes many people perceive Christianity from the scientific perspective, which leads them to rule out the transcendent elements of Christianity.

<sup>20</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 8, 158. The TSPM and the CCC have run a national campaign to stress “faith in accordance with the Bible,” “individual spiritual development,” and “Christian ethics” since 1998. They have tried to underplay “justification by faith” because it would exalt Christians and despise others, thus aggravate the conflict between them. Ding tried to demythologize the Bible by saying that in the Bible, the harsh words against human beings were not part of the inspiration of God’s Word. He regarded the extreme reverent attitude toward the Bible as worshipping the Bible as an idol. See Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 52, 54.

preachers. This idea of holistic quality includes spiritual, moral, psychological, educational, civil, entrepreneurial, and physical appearance dimensions. For example, preachers may be under evaluation by the criteria of having a solemn appearance, doing good works, maintaining a good reputation, having a loving heart, demonstrating sincere spiritual pursuits, and having a profound cultural/civil knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Confused by liberals, congregations become less clear about the authentic meaning of “sanctification” and “perfection,” which refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to make Christians holy, as one of the effects of Jesus’ salvation, with the participatory responses from Christians.

Moreover, liberals proclaim a gospel of prosperity and success. The messages that promise both material and spiritual blessings in this and next life attract many nonbelievers. However, they flood churches with the influence of consumer culture, which affects the spiritual life of many Christian bosses. Those bosses deeply rooted in evangelicalism have to go against the tide to uphold the Truth instead of material gain. They use business networks to recruit believers and establish more churches and gathering places.<sup>22</sup> They actively get involved in the church and community affairs and employ the liberalized social climate to the advantage of the divine kingdom.<sup>23</sup>

Cao comments, “[T]he religiosity of Chinese Protestant Christians is not so much related to acts of spiritual seeking in a state-centered political framework as it is shaped

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<sup>21</sup> Guo, “Jiangdao Renyuan Sushi Tan,” 39–40.

<sup>22</sup> Lee, “An Update,” 300. For the example of Kai Feng, the founder of Shenyang Huaxia People Folk Village Incorporation, see Cai, “Shenyang Huaxiaren,” para. 12–13.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, “An Update,” 301. See also Chen and Huang, “Emergence of a New Type of Christians in China,” 183–200, and Chen, *Zhuanxingqi de Zhongguo Jidujiao*, 135–65. Cao notes that “Christian entrepreneurs are given official permission and blessing to set up chapels and preach in their factories, not only as a gesture of official respect for local bosses’ personal religious beliefs and entrepreneurial productivity but also as an appreciation of Christian moral culture as an effective means of workforce discipline.” See Cao, “Raising the Quality of Belief,” 64. However, to make the factories become the venues of religious activities, the Christian bosses still need to abide by the Regulations on Religious Affairs to get approval from the government. If the government does not approve it, they may operate it illegally with the temporary auspice of some officers. In both ways, they may lose their protection when the religious policy becomes tightened, or the bosses lose the favour of the government.

by desires and practices of self-making among neoliberal individuals under rapid marketization.”<sup>24</sup> Cao’s comment discloses the immediate context of Chinese evangelicals in the government-sanctioned churches that challenges their spiritual pursuit. These Chinese evangelicals must acknowledge their challenges and approach their spiritual growth with them clearly in mind.

### Reading the Bible

Usually, government-sanctioned churches convey the message of the Bible mainly through the pulpit. They emphasize the New Testament, especially the four gospels, which focus on the life of Jesus. Most churches do not provide adult Sunday school. Recently, they often exhort the congregations to apply historical-grammatical exegesis, exploring the original meaning of the Scripture and avoiding reading the Bible passages out of context.<sup>25</sup>

Many Chinese evangelicals diligently read the Bible by themselves and learn the Bible through social media. They acknowledge that only true believers can truly understand the Bible, and it takes prayer and humility to seek God’s teaching.<sup>26</sup> They resist the liberal messages, possibly delivered from the pulpit. Furthermore, they expect that their lives should manifest the message of the Bible.

However, some aspects of Guangxun Ding’s perspectives get into Chinese evangelicals’ Bible reading.<sup>27</sup> Trying to accommodate believers and churches to the socialist society, Ding interprets the Bible from the perspective of God’s universal love

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<sup>24</sup> Cao, “Raising the Quality of Belief,” 54.

<sup>25</sup> Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 54.

<sup>26</sup> Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 55.

<sup>27</sup> Ding has greatly influenced government-sanctioned churches because he had been the chairperson of the TSPM for seventeen years and honourable chairperson for fifteen years.

and Christian brotherhood which extends to nonbelievers.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, some Chinese evangelicals tend to make biblical messages less offensive and more acceptable to nonbelievers. They may downplay the texts disclosing the wrath of God and the depravity of human beings but uphold the passages showing the promise of God, the love of God, and the value of human beings.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Ding stresses the moral example of Jesus, which is appealing to people who are familiar with Confucianism and aim at becoming 君子(*junzi*, sages), morally perfected persons who embody the highest moral values. Many intellectuals come to faith because of the compelling moral goodness of Jesus, compared to the exemplars of self-centered or depraved behaviour that they observe around them.<sup>30</sup> Under such influence, some Chinese evangelicals focus on the moral teachings of the Bible and apply them in their life to be good family members, good workers, and good citizens.

### Prayer

Many churches hold prayer meetings on weekdays. Chinese evangelicals also gather at homes for praying, voluntarily and unofficially. When they get what they request, they share testimonies that God has answered their prayer.

Chinese evangelicals from government-sanctioned churches understand prayer mainly as petitionary prayer. Their prayer request demonstrates various dimensions of “peace” motif: personal health, family harmony, the unity of the churches, the

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<sup>28</sup> Ding, *Wenji*, 78–89.

<sup>29</sup> Influenced by Ding’s theology, Chinese evangelicals may tend to have a high expectation of human potential. They may stress the effects of human effort, which is different from the Eastern Orthodox perspective of free will. Even though Eastern Orthodoxy holds that the cooperation of the Holy Spirit and the devotees’ freedom accomplishes union with God, it notes the necessity of constant grace from God. See Lossky, *Eastern Church*, 216.

<sup>30</sup> Yieh, “Reading the Sermon on the Mount,” 155.

development of the nation, and the peace of the world. The prayer items related to prosperity, including wealth, safety, and blessings for the next generations, are very significant for them.

The most common prayer request is for healing. Praying in the name of Jesus for the sick stresses the role of Jesus as Savior and Healer.<sup>31</sup> In the regions where people believe that the power of the evil spirits works in illness, many believers and nonbelievers usually regard prayer for healing in the name of Jesus as the divine power that overcomes evil. Healing experiences become the witness to the presence of the Christian God and the power of Christ.<sup>32</sup> While in the regions, where people believe in the work of medicine, praying for healing is often about asking God to help the doctors with a proper diagnosis and the right prescription and speed up the recovery process. Many intellectuals are quicker to accept the latter perspective of praying than the former one.<sup>33</sup>

Chinese evangelicals have experienced tension between prayer and action. Some active evangelicals, who emphasize the importance of praying to God from time to time, even blame some believers for only kneeling to pray for everything but without taking any action.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, they perceive freely confessing personal sinfulness and unworthiness in public and private prayer as personal pride, a stereotyped superficial ritual formality and routine practices, focusing on self-commitment instead of edifying and doing good for others. They prioritize actively serving others and pursuing goodness

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<sup>31</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> The Regulations on Religious Affairs do not allow praying for the sick and demand that the churches should not hinder people from seeking the care of the doctors and the medical system.

<sup>34</sup> Cao, "Raising the Quality of Belief," 61.

over prayer as the ways to demonstrate their faithfulness to God, even though they do not oppose the practice of praying to God.<sup>35</sup>

Some Chinese evangelicals practice reflection as prayer. They need to avoid the tendency to exclude the involvement of the divine being in such a spiritual discipline, influenced by some liberals who reject the divinity of Jesus and traditional eschatological beliefs.<sup>36</sup> If they do not engage with God in the practice, reflection and examination may become mere Confucian efforts for self-improvement.<sup>37</sup>

### Worship and Hymns

Singing hymns is essential to public and private worship for Chinese evangelicals. Many churches spend more than half an hour each Sunday on teaching congregants to sing the hymns from the official hymnal *新编赞美诗* (*Xinbian Zanneishi, The New Hymnal of Praise*). The CCC published *The New Hymnal of Praise* in 1983 to meet the spiritual needs of public worship and personal devotion.<sup>38</sup> The editors have considered both ecumenical and indigenous purposes when they compile these hymns. The chosen hymns are from various denominational backgrounds, historical eras, and ethnicities.<sup>39</sup> It contains a selection of hymns from more than thirteen Chinese hymnals and many

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<sup>35</sup> Cao, "Raising the Quality of Belief," 60.

<sup>36</sup> Starr, *Reading Christian Scriptures*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Starr, *Reading Christian Scriptures*, 4. It may become an example of the syncretism of Christianity by Confucianism.

<sup>38</sup> The hymnal is widely adopted by the government-sanctioned churches.

<sup>39</sup> These hymnals include *普天颂赞* (*Putian Songzan, Hymns of Universal Praise*, both 1936 and 1977 editions), *颂主诗篇* (*Songzhu Shipian, Hymns of Praise*), *颂主圣歌* (*Songzhu Shengge, Chinese Hymnary*), *新颂主诗集* (*Xin Songzhu Shipian, New Hymns of Praise*), *圣诗选集* (*Shengshi Xuanji, Selected Sacred Songs*), *宣道诗* (*Xundao Shi, Evangel Hymnal*), *颂赞诗歌* (*Songzan Shige, Hymns of the Christian Assemblies*), *灵粮诗歌* (*Lingliang Shige, Spiritual Food Hymnal*), *救恩颂赞得胜歌* (*Jiu'en Songzan Deshengge, Hymnals of Salvation, Praise and Victory*), *晨星短歌* (*Chenxing Duange, Morning Star Choruses*), *杖竿短歌集* (*Zhanggan Guangeji, Rod-and-Staff Choruses*), and *教会短歌* (*Jiaohui Duange, Choruses of the Church*).

indigenous Chinese hymns. It consists of four hundred hymns, with two hundred and ninety-two from the missionary era, and forty-two short hymns as the appendix, which are very easy to sing and memorize even for the illiterate seniors.

*The New Hymnal of Praise* has expressed a strong message that the hymns should be inspired by the biblical texts so that they can be fit for the doctrinal exhortation.<sup>40</sup> The lyrics of several hymns from *The New Hymnal of Praise* are direct quotes from Psalms 23, 100, 103, 121, and 150.<sup>41</sup> *The New Hymnal of Praise* becomes so significant in the Christian life for both praising and exhortation that quite large volumes are printed and bound together with the Bible.

However, church gatherings for young people would consider the factors of both doctrinal exhortation and experiential expression. To achieve the latter purpose, they would choose contemporary hymns, including songs from 赞美之泉 (*Zanmei zi Quan*, Stream of Praise). Many songs are imbued with North American musical style or Chinese popular music with a through-composed melody of a narrow range, mostly in a low tessitura, with several repeated notes, which are easily picked up by young people.<sup>42</sup> These songs aid many believers to find a voice, which they may not know before, to express their faith experience, mostly in an emotional way, and articulate it to God.

### Communal Life

Chinese evangelicals highly value communal life. They have a strong sense of responsibility to evangelize their family members, relatives, or friends after their

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<sup>40</sup> Strandenaes, "Bible," 74.

<sup>41</sup> Strandenaes, "Bible," 75.

<sup>42</sup> Strandenaes, "Bible," 75. Some songs that are suitable for the concerts contain tunes with frequent syncopations, unusual melodic progressions, and a low tessitura that make the song less singable.

conversion. Thus, they spontaneously organize regular prayer meetings or sharing gatherings at homes. Joseph Lee notes

Christian families kept faith alive and conversion followed the social hierarchy; that is, the Christian patriarchs, mostly older men and women, instructed the younger members of the family in the faith, because family and marriage ties involved a sense of loyalty to household leaders. This hierarchical social structure bore witness to the impact of traditional Chinese culture, requiring that junior family and community members obey elder ones. The practice guaranteed a steady church growth and maintained the continued adherence of the Christians to their faith. When Christianity became a family religion, Jesus Christ publicly replaced the ancestor as the focus of worship and created a new religious and social identity to hold different generations of a Christian family together. Christian patriarchs saw conversion, baptism, and church affiliation as essential filial duties for their children.<sup>43</sup>

The churches stress building up good families. However, the religious regulations do not allow churches to proselytize children under the age of eighteen in public. Parents or guardians are the only people who are legitimate to give their children a religious education, according to the international human rights covenant that the Chinese government has signed.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Chinese evangelicals try to empower Christian parents to play the core role in their children's faith education and support Christian children with spiritual peer networks to face the challenges of atheistic education in the schools and through social media.<sup>45</sup>

### Life to Engage the World

Chinese evangelicals have many ways to engage the world, the first of which is evangelism. Because of the Regulations on Religious Affairs, they can only evangelize in the registered buildings. Thus, Sunday worship services, prayer meetings, fellowship

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<sup>43</sup> Lee, *Bible and the Gun*, 29, 83; Lee, "An Update," 287.

<sup>44</sup> According to Fenggang Yang, this is a grey area for the government's religious regulations. See Yang, "Red, Black, and Grey Markets of Religion," 97.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, "An Update," 288.

nights, Christmas celebrations, and Easter worship services are the occasions for evangelism. When I attended a church in Fuzhou twenty years ago, I witnessed dozens of people responding to the altar call during fellowship gathering every Saturday night.

Other than these public gatherings, hospital visitation and visiting the sick at home play a vital role in evangelism. Prayer and preaching during visitation are showing God's love, not only to the patients and their family members but also to others in the wards. Praying for healing and healing experiences are crucial in the life of the evangelists.<sup>46</sup> Whereas, when the regional governments tightly control religious affairs, it is hard for evangelicals to do hospital visitation without the invitation of the sick.

Furthermore, they need to handle the message of the gospel tenderly when they preach to the unbelieving sick. Many Chinese evangelicals believe that the sins of the sick may be one of the causes of their illness. Thus, they usually need to consider how they do not offend the sick while delivering a message that emphasizes the sinful nature of humans, the necessity of confession and repentance for conversion, and the importance of rebirth and regeneration for being in favour with God.<sup>47</sup> They have to pray with caution, especially in public, because the regulations do not allow any prayer for healing that prevents people from seeking medical treatment.<sup>48</sup>

Another significant way for evangelicals to engage the world is to participate in social concern. Instead of being involved in civil rights protests, they take part in caring for orphans, seniors, and children whose parents are working far away from home. In some regions, some churches can have full ownership of orphanages, senior homes, or student centers, which they can have some freedom to operate according to a Christian

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<sup>46</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 6–7.

<sup>47</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Lambert, *Resurrection*, 82–83.

perspective. Some evangelicals also participate in local non-Christian operated organizations but have to bear in mind that the regulations do not allow them to proselytize others when they engage in charitable activities. Therefore, they have to first win the trust of nonbelievers through their love and care, and then wait for the right time for personal sharing and evangelism.

### Connection with Christian Mysticism

Chinese evangelicals from government-sanctioned churches feel that they need to seek the presence of God, as a result of being on guard against liberalism. They perceive God's presence in the prosperity of Christians, the increasing number of converts, the expansion of the churches, and the contribution to society. Even though their perception has different foci from that of Christian mystics, who pay more attention to the inner life for the experience of God's presence, their intention of seeking the divine presence can play the role of connection for them to explore mysticism.

Furthermore, Chinese evangelicals try to avoid the segregation of the spiritual and material spheres of daily life.<sup>49</sup> Influenced by Ding's perspective of the cosmic Christ, they tend to extend their love toward believers to nonbelievers, their devotion to their churches to the society and nature as well.<sup>50</sup> Their compassionate spirit and action for the material needs of the world are resonant with that of mysticism.

Moreover, when Chinese evangelicals pursue to be good families, good workers, and good citizens, they stress that they need to have concrete actions that meet some rules or standards. They regard "piety" without specific behaviours that benefit others as faked

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<sup>49</sup> Cao, "Raising the Quality of Belief," 64.

<sup>50</sup> Yieh, "Reading the Sermon on the Mount," 156.

performance. Therefore, they would appreciate mystical spirituality that insists that knowing and doing are integrative through union with God.

## 2. Chinese Evangelicals in Traditional Non-Charismatic Churches

### The Immediate Context

Chinese evangelicals who attend non-government-sanctioned traditional churches have great concern on whether these churches are from a non-charismatic tradition or charismatic (灵恩 *ling'en*) tradition. Therefore, I separate them into two groups.

Nevertheless, they share many similarities as they have previously shared the same name “house churches.”<sup>51</sup> In some areas, there are no clear-cut distinctions between them.<sup>52</sup>

Traditional non-charismatic churches carry on the legacy of the late evangelical leaders such as Mingdao Wang and Tuosheng Ni (Watchman Nee). These leaders committing their life to suffer for the faith has encouraged many evangelicals to uphold their positions in a complex context.

Wang’s rebirth theology, which holds that authentic Christians are born-again, has become the signature of Chinese evangelicalism. It upholds that conversion is not merely the change of mind and action, but fundamentally the birth of a new life from/in Christ

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<sup>51</sup> “House churches” refer to the churches that have to operate non-formally at homes because they do not want to register with the government. Recently, the situation has changed. Some house churches have moved to buildings that are approved by the government. Some house churches rent public buildings for worshipping before they are shut down by the government because they have not applied for a permit. In a word, some “house churches” are not operated at homes anymore. “House churches” are concerned that Christians at the government-sanctioned churches are vulnerable to be infiltrated and controlled by the atheist regime and may become the mouthpiece for its atheistic agenda. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 262. The slogan to speak for the government is “all colleagues and fellow-Christians throughout China gather closely around the Chinese Communist Party and the people’s government.”

<sup>52</sup> Some churches in one group may share strong characteristics with those in the other group. The description in this section may or may not demonstrate the features of some particular churches who claim to be traditional non-charismatic churches and vice versa. Moreover, those who claim to be charismatic churches may find themselves quite agreeable with the description in this section, and vice versa.

through the Holy Spirit, which encourages seeking transformation from the perspective of the inner life and ontological dimension.

Nee's spiritual theology and teachings have a lasting broader influence among Chinese evangelicals because Nee's followers publish and widely distribute his works. However, his impact becomes weak because the new generations have access to more and more resources from various sources. Moreover, few leaders organize training and retreat that focuses on both the spiritual life and theology to meet contemporary needs, using Nee's resources as he did before.

Under the influence of these leaders, traditional non-charismatic churches emphasize the core aspects of the gospel: repentance, rebirth, salvation, baptism, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, they distinguish themselves from those cults who uphold only one or two aspects of the gospel.<sup>53</sup> Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan summarize their characteristics as “vibrant in faith, evangelistic in outreach, fundamentalist in doctrine, pious in devotion, informal in liturgy, spontaneous in development and flexible in structure.”<sup>54</sup>

Contemporary leaders are generally laypersons with strong personalities and personal charisma.<sup>55</sup> When they lead a dozen people to Christ, they start a house church, officiating the Lord's Supper and baptism. These leaders, with little theological education, can share the gospel from rich experience and assurance of living in God's promises.<sup>56</sup> According to their experience, their understanding of God and God's Word comes from their intimate relationship with God instead of formal theological education. However,

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<sup>53</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 204–5.

<sup>54</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 178.

<sup>55</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 178.

<sup>56</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 185.

lacking theological training that focuses on both spiritual life and doctrinal knowledge hinders these leaders from building a powerful evangelical identity for their churches while pursuing spiritual growth.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, they would not go to government-sanctioned seminaries and training centers. Neither would they send their church members there. They hold that the government and the CCP have no right over Christ's churches and theological education.

### Reading the Bible

Many evangelicals attending traditional non-charismatic churches and charismatic churches stress that the Bible is “a wide-open book” where a believer can “pick up fresh manna every day.”<sup>58</sup> Wang's teachings on the interpretation of the Bible have affected them. Wang stresses the plain meanings of God's Word in its grammatical, literary, and historical contexts. He encourages the use of the mind to analyze the texts and interpret obscure words or ideas by cross-references to other passages that have explicit meanings. Meanwhile, Wang also applies the principles of 灵意解经 (*Lingyi Jiejing*, spiritual interpretation). He stresses that only those who are born again and led by the Holy Spirit can rightly discern the meanings of God's Word. He advises Christians to wait in silence for the teaching of the Holy Spirit whenever they seek to understand the Scripture because only the Holy Spirit knows God's will. Wang often remarks that the Word of

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<sup>57</sup> As Chan observes, the current education system that encourages reading for gaining information may be a hindrance to the spiritual reading of God's Word with the heart. See Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 162. Chinese evangelicals may be hesitant to attend training that merely focuses on intellectual knowledge.

<sup>58</sup> Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 51.

God should be masticated repeatedly, swallowed joyfully, and digested internally until it nurtures the spiritual life.<sup>59</sup>

The little flocks do not deny the necessity of the intellectual understanding of the Bible. However, they go further to highlight that genuinely knowing God's Word lies in receiving the illumination of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup> Illumination experience may confirm the existing knowledge that a person possesses intellectually and make it the reality of his/her spiritual life. It may also disclose something new. The illumination concerning particular scriptural passages may be beneficial for a general understanding of the sanctification journey, or specific guidance for a concrete situation.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, the little flocks believe that God demands the devotees to pay the price when they receive divine illumination. As Nee says,

[The Holy Spirit] often takes out from the treasure chest many fresh and forgotten truths, to test whether or not his people respect his words and confess his position (*diwei* 地位) [as the Lord]. The old and well-known truth might not have much of an impact on the conscience. [But] new and fresh truth compels new and fresh confessions. The new and fresh price is perhaps very high: to demand those who receive him to oppose the tides of their days, to separate themselves from the flotsam of the world.<sup>62</sup>

In a word, the understanding of the Bible involves the quality of spiritual life. As Yuming Jia notes, one's rational faculties must first be made spiritual and one's reason must undergo a baptism by the Holy Spirit to understand the spiritual meaning of the biblical text and comprehend the mystery of the spiritual world. For Jia, moral cultivation and transformation in daily life are the spiritual disciplines for gaining the spiritualization

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<sup>59</sup> Yieh, "Reading the Sermon on the Mount," 154.

<sup>60</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 90.

<sup>61</sup> Wu, *Understanding*, 125.

<sup>62</sup> Ni, *Moxiang Qishilu*, 90–91.

of the rational faculties.<sup>63</sup> For Nee, it is the process that the mind becomes in harmony with the Holy Spirit.

Many evangelicals realize that God promises to enable the devotees to know the truth: “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:31–32 NASB).’” The ability to understanding the Bible has to do with obeying God’s Word. Thus, the pursuit of God’s Word ends up with life transformation instead of merely gaining information.

Therefore, when people claim that they have received divine illumination, a possible way to discern whether these experiences come from the Holy Spirit is to look into their spiritual life.<sup>64</sup> It becomes clear that mature Christians are keen on understanding God’s truth. However, evangelicals need to guard against the tendency to rely on these elites blindly and exclusively for interpreting the Bible. Instead, they should encourage all to pursue spiritual growth to acquire the privilege of understanding God’s Word.

These Chinese evangelicals have confidence in the Bible and in one’s ability to grasp its truth because they trust God in his willingness to reveal to the chosen ones what they need to know. It is not because they attest that they can know everything about God, but because they have faith in God’s sovereignty and grace.

Practically, they organize Bible study groups and attempt to memorize large portions of the Bible because they think every word of the Bible as God’s Word is imperative and remembering them can help to keep their thoughts divine. Some

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<sup>63</sup> Wan, “Competing Tensions,” 104.

<sup>64</sup> Bretzke, “Review,” 119–20.

evangelicals try to memorize the Bible by composing short songs with biblical texts as the lyrics. Furthermore, they stress the study of the life of Jesus, especially his teachings on taking up the cross and following him. However, even though they believe that they cannot interpret the Bible without the work of the Holy Spirit, without proper and practical instruction, they tend to read the Bible either in a literal way or in an inauthentic “allegorical” way.<sup>65</sup>

### Prayer Life

Both non-charismatic churches and charismatic churches put great emphasis on prayer. At public gatherings, the leaders usually lead the prayer. Sometimes, leaders ask all the congregants to pray aloud at the same time. Kneeling and praying on the floor, the cushions, or the steps are usual and natural for many evangelicals. Outside the meetings, sometimes they organize a pledge to fast and pray at a specific time for unusual prayer requests wherever they are. Praying at a scheduled time even though they are at different places shows their unity in offering God the prayer requests.

They pray persistently for their spiritual growth in grace and for God to grant greater freedom for the preaching of the gospel. Prosperity is not their focus.<sup>66</sup> Praying for healing is either to demonstrate God’s power or to have the physical health to serve God better, both for God’s glory.<sup>67</sup> They prioritize the transformation of their spirituality during the time of sickness over the outcome of getting healed.

Most importantly, the core purpose of prayer is to seek God’s will. Before they plan the ministry, they set out to pray earnestly first, trying to discern God’s will. Once

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<sup>65</sup> Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 56.

<sup>66</sup> Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions*, 186.

<sup>67</sup> Nee, *Desheng*, chapter 15.

they think they know God's will or the vision from God, they commit to it at all costs. Sometimes they set up twenty-four-hour prayer chains with several groups of prayer warriors. Each group is responsible for praying for a few hours every day. Those who pray are part of the team that carries out God's will or vision.<sup>68</sup> Both those who pray and those who carry out the plan are indispensable members of the body of Christ.

Through fervent prayer, Chinese evangelicals have experienced the tremendous power of the Holy Spirit. They witness lost souls turning to Christ in remarkable ways. Moreover, as Jesus promises in the Bible, the wonders and signs accompany their prayers, including exorcism, healing, setting free from the bondage of sin, and God's timely providence.<sup>69</sup> What makes them different from those in the traditional charismatic churches is that they do not fervently pursue miracles or supernatural experiences as if without these experiences, they cannot assure the presence of God. Instead, emphasizing the transformation of their spirituality, they play down these experiences when they think these experiences may become the source of temptation to distract them from pursuing God's glory and God himself.<sup>70</sup> Thus, upon receiving these experiences, they give thanks to God and hold high Christ instead of themselves and their experiences.

### Worship and Hymns

Hymns are important for public and personal worship, as is the influence of the legacy left from the missionary era. However, missionaries from various denominations bring with them their hymnals. Claiming that they are non-denominational, these Chinese evangelicals compile their hymnals to serve their groups. They not only write their songs

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<sup>68</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 181.

<sup>69</sup> Nee, *Desheng*, chapters 13, 15, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Lian, *Redeemed by Fire*, 171–73.

but also select songs from the Chinese hymnals of various denominations that deliver the messages that are in accordance with biblical teachings. They also translate songs from foreign languages. They uphold the pedagogical value of these songs for theological positions and spiritual dedication to God and Christ.<sup>71</sup> Many Christians use the hymnals compiled by Nee and the little flocks. These hymnals demonstrate that the emphasis of their teachings is Christ-centered.<sup>72</sup>

The little flocks, who are conservative in abiding by the teachings of the Bible, do not celebrate Easter and Christmas as festivals because the Bible does not record these two festivals.<sup>73</sup> Thus, they do not have songs for these two occasions. However, they do stress Christ's incarnation and resurrection.

Some churches have no choir for worship. There are various reasons for no choir. Wang argues that praising God on behalf of the congregants is a privilege for those who are holy. He notes that since it is hard to assure that all the choir members have the required spiritual maturity, it is better to have no choir at all.<sup>74</sup> The little flocks perceive

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<sup>71</sup> Wu and Wang, "Juhuichu Shige," 320–33.

<sup>72</sup> Nee published the first edition of *小群诗歌* (*Xiaoqun Shige, Songs for the Little Flock*) in 1928. Later, the hymnal was renamed as *诗歌* (*Shige, Songs*) and published for more than twenty editions. The largest volume published in 1952 collected one thousand and fifty-two hymns. They include the following categories: the Horn of the Gospel (177 songs with subgroups like Savior Jesus, Eternal Blessings, and Judgement and Eternity), the Word of Praise (263 songs with subgroups like God's Love, God's Righteousness, and the Joy of Salvation.), Christ as Life (480 songs with subgroups like the Spirit of Life, Confession and Restoration, and the Pursuit of Holiness), and Church Life (132 songs with subgroups like Buried to Christ, Union—Laying on of Hands, and Remembering the Lord). See Wang, "Fuzhou Jidutu Juhuichu de Shige Chutan," para. 6–12. Many hymnals published later chose songs from this 1952 volume. In 1993, the CCC and the TSPM in Jiangsu Province chose 353 songs from this volume and printed *诗歌* (*选本*) (*Shige (Xunben), Songs (Selection)*) to show respect for the little flocks and other non-government-sanctioned churches. Thus, *诗歌* (*选本*) becomes the government-sanctioned hymnals to be published, distributed, and owned by many Christians.

<sup>73</sup> Guest, *God in Chinatown*, 107.

<sup>74</sup> Chen, *Wangmingdao*, chapter 7.

the practice of having no choir from a different angle. They regard every worshipper as a priest, thus having the privilege to present praise as a sacrifice to God.<sup>75</sup>

These Chinese evangelicals do not restrain their emotions when they sing hymns or praise God in public. However, they think that the attitude of seriousness, solemnity, or reverence is central for worshipping God. Thus, they restrain themselves from popular music and actions, such as clapping hands and waving arms.

### Communal Life

Communal life is the practice of the biblical truth that every Christian is a member of the body of Christ and has a role to play. The new believers usually acknowledge the necessity of listening to the teaching of mature believers for spiritual growth. All the group members should come together to discern God's will for the group and carry out the mission granted by God. When they carry out the mission plan, amid prayer support, the evangelists go and lead the lost souls to conversion, and then those who have gifts in pastoring follow up immediately to build up these new converts to serve the Lord.

Communal life also provides support and comfort for the members. Especially amid persecution, a community that is rooted in putting faith in Christ is essential for overcoming hardships and growing in the Spirit, personally and corporately. Therefore, as Lee observes,

[t]hese Christians...followed a pattern of religious activism...They ignored what they could not change, while making use of the situation to preserve their strength. They kept a very low profile and organized cell groups and home meetings at the grassroots level...these Christians had successfully established highly autonomous and widespread worshipping communities according to their needs, despite persistent interference and systematic control from the state.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Zhang, "Cong Difang Jiaohui," para. 20–22.

<sup>76</sup> Lee, "An Update," 289.

### Life to Engage the World

Chinese evangelicals at traditional non-charismatic churches have a strong eschatological sense that Christ's second coming is imminent, which prompts their passion for evangelism. However, they do not believe that Christ would reign through social reformation. Thus, they do not participate in political activities, and they are less committed to so-called “文化使命” (*Wenhua Shiming*, cultural mission) to try to reform society through political participation and their professional skills and knowledge.

Since it is hard for them to hold a large public assembly without raising the attention of the local governments, they try to do evangelism in some other ways.<sup>77</sup> Some evangelicals in the cities give out tracts on buses, trains, and subways, disregarding the regulations that forbid the distribution of the gospel tracts in public. If anyone opposes their activity, they just politely move to other places.<sup>78</sup> Some churches and church members run factories with the specific goal to do evangelism. Moreover, some churches establish the drug treatment and rehabilitation centers, clearly claiming that the resolution for the drug addict is the gospel of Jesus. Their purpose of evangelism is direct and explicit.

Many evangelicals witness for Christ with their Christ-centered life. The peace and joy demonstrated in their life may attract some persons who start inquiring. Then, they may share the gospel with these people. If they have the opportunity, the believers

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<sup>77</sup> They bring friends to churches with caution. They cannot promote the meetings, including the evangelistic meetings with a high profile.

<sup>78</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 186. There are many CCTV surveillance cameras with face recognition that function to trace down those who break the regulations in public, which indicates that the evangelicals cannot do street evangelism regularly without attracting attention. Meanwhile, many security administrators in the streets closely supervise the execution of the security regulations.

will ask the enquirers whether they confess that they are sinners and want to put faith in Christ.

Some evangelicals do mission in other provinces regardless of the government's restriction. Lambert records the experience of the little flocks in Xiaoshan, "after earnest prayer, several went out to Guangxi and Hunan provinces to preach. Soon they returned with the good news that several dozen people had been converted... They set off in pairs in mid-March 1991 for Hunan, Shandong, northern Jiangsu, Sichuan and other places all over China."<sup>79</sup>

These evangelicals suffer because of witnessing their faith and upholding God's truth. Many of them interpret this suffering theologically. They perceive their suffering for faith as "union in Christ's suffering" and "union with those who suffered during the Mao era." They also regard suffering is as a test of their faith and dependence on God's delivery and a divine way to purify individuals' spirituality and churches.<sup>80</sup> Many Chinese evangelicals are resonant with what Lambert has discovered from his interviews that "[t]hey prefer the present situation of limited freedom and periodic crackdowns as more conducive, in God's providence, to produce true disciples from the ranks of the millions of new converts."<sup>81</sup> Most importantly, they endure suffering by "giving thanks in all circumstances," according to Wang's instruction, "[i]f we have truly learned to 'give

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<sup>79</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 181.

<sup>80</sup> Lee, "An Update," 289.

<sup>81</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 209. Lambert also writes that "[t]hey are often aware of the shallowness of spiritual life in the churches in the West, and have seen the havoc wrought in Eastern Europe by the total collapse of Communism and the subsequent freedom, with its inroads of materialism, pornography and the mafia." Therefore, these Chinese evangelicals prefer suffering under the regime of the CPP to the religious freedom enjoyed by the western Christians.

thanks in all circumstances' then even in times of trouble we will never feel the slightest hardship."<sup>82</sup>

### Connection with Christian Mysticism

Contemporary Chinese non-charismatic evangelicalism manifests the mystical element in early Chinese evangelicalism because of Watchman Nee's influence. They share several similar motifs with mysticism.

First, both Chinese non-charismatic evangelicalism and mysticism value experiential encounter with God more than merely intellectually knowing about God. Devotees emphasize an engaging interpersonal experience with God. Having the information of God cannot show that God has an intimate relationship with them. Instead of showing what they do, devotees zooms in on their life experiences that witness to God's interaction with them.

They also embrace miraculous experiences for the glory of God because they accept the dominant role of the Holy Spirit in granting these experiences. God-centered disposition directs their attitude toward miraculous experiences. Miraculous experiences as a divine-human encounter connote the knowing and loving relationship between God and devotees instead of highlighting spectacular impersonal phenomena. Therefore, their acceptance of miraculous experiences seems to be passive and with scrutiny.

Believing the dominant role of the Holy Spirit in initiating the divine-human encounter, they do not rely on a set of liturgy as the norms for acquiring a direct experience of God. Since they constantly expect God's presence, in their ordinary life and in carrying out God's mission, a set of liturgy would confine such earnest expectation.

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<sup>82</sup> This is translated and quoted in Chan and Hunter, *Prayers and Thoughts*, 22.

However, they realize that a preparation of high concentration of attentiveness on God is necessary. Individual devotees may develop their practices of attentiveness according to their need and situation. For example, some Chinese non-charismatic evangelicals focus on God through reciting the biblical verses or ascetic lifestyle; while some mystics integrate it with breathing rhythm.

Furthermore, both Chinese non-charismatic evangelicals and mystics hold that a better knowing God requires a more mature spirituality while the latter also depends on the former. Therefore, it is a mutual promoting progress. Meanwhile, knowing God and progressive spirituality are both God's grace and human responsibility. God initiates and devotees participate and respond. Through their experience, they realize that knowing God and life transformation accompany sacrifices and suffering.

### 3. Chinese Evangelicals in Traditional Charismatic Churches

#### The Immediate Context

Many traditional charismatic churches were established and developed in rural villages and towns at China's central areas in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>83</sup> Then evangelical leaders began to build churches in cities. Most of their networks are still outside cities because the government's security administration in the cities is tighter than that in rural areas. The recognized church networks include *The Chinese Gospel Fellowship*, *The Chinese Fangcheng Fellowship (China for Christ)*, and *The Wenzhou Fellowship*.<sup>84</sup> Some have their roots in non-charismatic churches but turn charismatic after they actively interact

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<sup>83</sup> Yu, "Wei Jidujiao Jiatingjiaohui Tuomin," para. 8.

<sup>84</sup> These networks have their centers in one place or province, but their evangelism and the established churches are cross-provincial. According to their statistics, they have several million members. Simon Chan calls this phenomenon "churchless." See Chan, *Grassroots*, 167. Chinese evangelical churches with less institutional elements are one of the positive factors for appropriating mystical traditions.

with the overseas Christian leaders with the charismatic background.<sup>85</sup> The charismatic experience and the rapid growth of the converts have attracted them.

A prominent element of these churches is the emphasis on exorcism, healing, vision, and prophecy.<sup>86</sup> The local governments think that these “superstitious” phenomena may misguide the masses away from seeking rational resolutions to the hardships in their life. Therefore, they crack down on these churches right away when they think that these churches could disrupt the normal life and the stability of society. The local police officers claim that they cannot distinguish these churches from those “邪教” (*Xiejiao*, evil cults) because both crave “superstitious spectacles.” Sometimes, they arrest the members of these churches with the excuse that they are cracking down on “evil cults.”<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, these churches are learning to make themselves distinct from the “evil cults” so that they can protect themselves from misunderstandings.<sup>88</sup> Hence, they

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<sup>85</sup> Yang, “Red, Black, and Grey Markets of Religion,” 108.

<sup>86</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 205.

<sup>87</sup> The government has banned several groups as “evil cults” such as the Shouters, the Complete Domain Church, the New Testament Church, the Oriental Lightning or the Almighty God, the Assembly of Disciples, and the Church of Spirits. See Palmer, “Heretical Doctrines,” 126–27. The reasons for the ban are the leaders manipulating their members to break the laws and decrees of the state, their gatherings disturbing the social order, their approaches deceiving the public, causing deaths, swindling people of their goods and money, involving raping women, and committing other crimes of superstition or heresy. Most of them demonstrate political ambition, the apocalyptic doctrines, and self-deification of the masters, who lead a corrupted life but impose the ascetic principles on the followers. They use Christianity as a tool to carry out anti-social activities. The CCC has denounced these groups as heretical. See Qin and Tan, *Zhongguo Mimi Shehui*, 2–3, 113–21. “Legislative Resolution on Banning Heretic Cults” was issued in 1999, which legitimized the crackdown of the cultic groups. See Yang, “Red, Black, and Grey Markets of Religion,” 100–101.

<sup>88</sup> Feng, “Xiejiao Bushi Zhongjiao,” 24–25. From the perspective of Chinese social science, genuine religion can adapt itself to the social development and respond to the spiritual needs of those who are perplexed by the contemporary situation, while it admits its limitation in meeting the needs of the complicated reality. Thus, it is easy to tell the deception of the “evil cults” that usually claim to be the panacea of life problems only if people join their organizations and follow the order of their leaders. See Guo, *Dangdai Shijie Xiejiao yu Fanxiejiao*, 51–52. These cults are “evil” because they are anti-social and anti-human; thus, they destabilize the socio-political order. See Palmer, “Heretical Doctrines,” 134.

emphasize that they worship only one transcendent divinity instead of any leader, and their life demonstrates that they are servants of this God and his followers.

### Reading the Bible

The leaders of the church networks presented their view of the Bible in 1999:

We believe the sixty-six books of the Bible to be inspired by God and that they were written by the prophets and apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the complete truth and without error; it will allow no one to change it in any manner. The Bible clearly describes God's plan of redemption for man. The Bible is the highest standard of our faith, life, and service. We are opposed to all those who deny the Bible [as the Word of God]; we are opposed to the view that the Bible is out of date; we are opposed to the view that the Bible has error; and we are opposed to those who believe only in selected sections of the Bible. We want to emphasize that the Scripture must be interpreted in light of their historical context and within the overall context of Scriptural teachings. In seeking to understand Scripture, one must seek the leading of the Holy Spirit, and not taking anything out of context. In interpreting Scripture, one ought to consult the traditions of orthodox belief left by the church throughout her history. We are opposed to interpreting Scripture by one's own will, or by subjective spiritualization.<sup>89</sup>

However, many of their members lack theological and exegetical training and practical guidance for reading the Bible. Especially when most of the rural believers are less educated and elderly, they tend to interpret the Bible through their experience instead of evaluating their experience with a biblical perspective. Furthermore, in the countryside, people are generally drawn to Chinese folk sects before conversion to Christianity. It is inevitable for Christians, especially the beginners, to interpret the Bible from their previous perspectives. For example, when they read the gospels, they regard miracles and the healings of Jesus as salvation, while neglecting the evangelical doctrine that salvation

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<sup>89</sup> Ailman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 297–98. It is part of the Confession of Faith of Chinese House Churches. It is a confession of several church networks that are traditional charismatic churches instead of all the house churches. Jonathan Gao translates it into English.

is by faith in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>90</sup> This phenomenon can become an example of the syncretism of Christianity with Chinese folk sects.<sup>91</sup>

Hence, charismatic churches invite overseas theologians and biblical scholars to train the leaders first and then send the leaders to teach their members. The leaders encourage their members to read the Bible diligently and evaluate everything with the criteria provided by the teachings of the Bible. They abide by the biblical teachings to be perfect, witnessing God's glory by being transformed into Christ's image. Thus, they denounce materialism and perceive living a simple life as a way of denying themselves and following Christ's example. Furthermore, they resent violence and uphold love amid persecution.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, they affirm the eschatological doctrine about the end of the world. The overall members are watchful, prayerful, and diligently engaging in evangelism because of Jesus' imminent coming even though no one knows the date.<sup>93</sup>

### Prayer

Charismatic evangelicals freely express through prayer their desire for peace, brought by God's blessing after their repentance and God's forgiveness.<sup>94</sup> A hymn "Five O'clock Early Morning in China" expresses such a desire through praying to God early in the

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<sup>90</sup> From the Chinese folk sects' perspective, they regard the experience of Jesus' supernatural power to save people from difficulties and death an indication that these people are experiencing so-called salvation through Christ. They think that such a kind of salvation is all they need. Desiring to get out of their temporal hardship, they stop searching for the authentic redemption from their sin through Christ, which is missing from what the folk sects teach.

<sup>91</sup> Leung, *Nongcun Jiaohui*, 411–27.

<sup>92</sup> Guo, *Dangdai Shijie Xiejiao yu Fanxiejiao*, 36–42. They value the Bible as they claim. However, their ability to understand the Bible hinders them from an authentic practice of what the Bible teaches.

<sup>93</sup> They denounce the value of this world and expect the second coming of Jesus more than other evangelical groups, which one can tell from their hymnal *Canaan Hymns*. Some scholars regard *Canaan Hymns* as the confession of faith in this group of evangelicals. See Xu, *Zhongguo Jialili*, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Lee, "An Update," 295.

morning, asking a peaceful year with an abundant harvest for China. They also initiated a prayer movement in 2009 to mobilize the churches across China to sign up for a non-stop prayer movement, that is, praying for twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. This non-stop prayer movement has three main objectives: the prayer movement will become a place where people can make peace with each other; God will use this movement for churches to repent and reconcile with each other; it will be a place where people can make peace with God.<sup>95</sup>

Moreover, they eagerly pray for mystical experiences, which indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, they pray earnestly for healing for those who have no other resources to rely on for recovery from the sickness but the power of the Holy Spirit. Many people cannot deny the power of Jesus and convert to Jesus when they are healed or experience the process of healing in their desperation. The healing experience is a significant factor in the rapid growth of charismatic churches.<sup>96</sup> Amanda Porterfield comments that praying for healing is the expression of the desire to gain access to the divine power for physical and spiritual security, maybe even a holy life, although it may be a pragmatic understanding of Christianity.<sup>97</sup> Through praying for healing, converts learn to put faith in God, which helps them to understand the significance of prayer at the beginning of their Christian journey.<sup>98</sup> However, the healing experience is so impressive that many new converts are attached to the prayer of healing. The mystical power hinders them from moving forward to pray for maturity.

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas, "Non-Stop Prayer Movement Grips Atheist China," para. 14; "24 Xiaoshi," para. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Oblau, "Contemporary Christianity in China," 339.

<sup>97</sup> Porterfield, *Healing*, 13–18.

<sup>98</sup> Meng, "Wuxunzhong Zai Zhongguo," 6.

Furthermore, many immature members conclude that God grants those who have these experiences, usually the leaders, spiritual authority. They may worship these leaders instead of Christ, following them blindly. Bays notes that this situation may lead to the formation of sects that most Christians label heretical,<sup>99</sup> especially when the theological training offered by the churches cannot meet the needs of the rapid growth of the members.<sup>100</sup> Hunter and Chan also observe,

Miracles and wonders are a major starting point for many peasants converting to Christianity. However, Christianity provides more than pragmatic benefits; it ultimately calls for inner freedom, to detach oneself from material gains and to sacrifice oneself in response to a higher calling. It would require a lot of nurture and teaching for the full realization of Christianity, so that eventually believers will transform from a community emphasizing magical power into a community stressing the power of love. Otherwise, Christianity may be corrupted into another form of folk religion competing with other deities in performing supernatural action.<sup>101</sup>

### Worship and Hymns

Charismatic churches hold worship services in a non-formal environment with simple rituals. Their meetings tend to focus on giving believers intense emotional experiences, with expectations for healing and miracles.

Both communal and personal worship usually use the hymnal *Canaan Hymns*. It is a collection of hymns composed by Xiaomin Lu, who started writing hymns in 1990, shortly after her conversion at a Fangcheng church. Lu has written 1,682 hymns as of February 2016, even though she has no music education, not finishing middle school because she suffered from an illness. She experienced healing when her aunt prayed for

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<sup>99</sup> Bays, "Chinese Protestant," 467–97.

<sup>100</sup> A conservative person may have a concern that the reality lying behind the rapid growth is superficial affiliation. In 2003, 3,900 people of four networks enrolled in basic Bible training; however, these four networks had more than ten million members. See Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 73, 263.

<sup>101</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 206.

her, which led her to attend church and experience Christian conversion. She claims that her hymns are from the Holy Spirit. Charismatic churches love these hymns, which are usually short, simple, and rhymed with the lyric resembling Chinese folk songs.<sup>102</sup> These hymns are very catchy even without the accompaniment of the instruments. Lu is active in evangelism and undergoes persecution, including being sequestered to a detention center for a few months. Her songs have encouraged many evangelists and comforted those who are suppressed by all kinds of hardship.

However, some Christians critique that they can pick out many fundamental theological errors in the lyrics of *Canaan Hymns*, which are not in accordance with the fact or the truth of the Bible.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, they comment that many hymns focus on personal experiences and emotions instead of authentic spiritual experiences that are resonant with the teachings of the Bible. Lu confesses that one of the purpose of *Canaan Hymns* is to show that God meets their emotional needs. She also realizes that the traditional hymns grounded on the biblical doctrines guide them to God.<sup>104</sup> In light of this reality, instead of claiming all songs from *Canaan Hymns* are the work of the Holy Spirit, it is proper to open the inspiration in *Canaan Hymns* and the experience behind *Canaan Hymns* to discernment.

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<sup>102</sup> Some hymns from *Canaan hymns* are also popular among the government-sanctioned churches and overseas Chinese Christians.

<sup>103</sup> Gudao, *Shengshi Chuangzuo*, chapter 2, section 1. Such a phenomenon discloses the problems of hermeneutics in this group. They need proper education of theology and training on discernment to uphold their claim that they value the authority of the Bible.

<sup>104</sup> Choy, "Jianan Shixuan," para 6.

### Communal Life

The evangelicals at each charismatic church, especially for those in the countryside, find it easier to get support from their fellow Christians since they live close to each other. They also support each other by interceding earnestly for each other. Generally, their love for each other is pure, out of their experiences of the love of Christ. Since they denounce attachment to the world and materialism, it is easier for them to make a sacrifice to love others without thinking about the possibility of reciprocal gain.

Research shows that the formation of a network of relationships among the believers is essential for building up faith and for evangelism.<sup>105</sup> Under the influence of Chinese traditional culture, Chinese people recognize their obligation to safeguard the welfare of others within the relational network. After they become believers, along with their increasing involvement in the life of faith, they gradually build up the web of the church. The exhortation of the biblical truth, asking believers to love each other, and the experience of the authentic communal life enforces their role in this new network. This kind of communal life also helps them extend their strength for coping with life, not being confined by their personal or family resources. Attempting to include those people in their former relational web in the church network, they endeavour to preach the gospel to them. What they have experienced in the Christian communal life sets an excellent example of love for their family members, other families in the village, and even to other regions. With the passion of evangelicalism, they extend this network to these evangelistic prospects. Thus, they build up the networks of the churches “as the gospel passed from individual to individual, family to family, and village to village.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Lee, “Mapping Christian Networks,” 72.

<sup>106</sup> Lee, “Mapping Christian Networks,” 72–73.

### Life to Engage the World

Charismatic evangelicals are courageous and active in facing the challenges brought about by the popular cults in their community. When those who worship the gods or idols encounter hardship, they take the initiative in offering help and prayer in the name of Jesus, through which they claim that they are engaging in spiritual combats against the gods or idols. Their experiences of getting support from God, including healing experiences, also contribute to the spiritual combat “with the other players in the religious arena.”<sup>107</sup> Their victory has earned the honour for the Christian God and Christians. However, the active interaction with the popular cults has affected them that they tend to interpret their faith through the lens of these cults. When their faith becomes weak, they may be attracted to practice the sects. They are also at risk of being treated as the practitioners of the popular cults and deemed superstitious.

Charismatic evangelicals care more about God, their churches, and brothers and sisters in Christ than the reformation of the political system to gain more civil rights and freedom.<sup>108</sup> Many of them promote the separation of religion and politics and perceive engagement in politics to be unspiritual.<sup>109</sup> They lack the interest in gaining power, upholding the equality of all in the community and showing their tolerance and love to neighbours. They also run orphanages, adopting abandoned children and caring for physically challenged kids even though their resources are limited. Video documentary series *Cross: Jesus in China* shows that the believers who serve in the orphanages get no payment and devote to witness to the Lord Jesus and his love.<sup>110</sup> Because they want to

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<sup>107</sup> Bay, *New History*, 194.

<sup>108</sup> Yu, “Wei Jidujiao Jiatingjiaohui Tuomin,” para. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 85.

<sup>110</sup> The video documentary *Shizijia*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRTBh0LykAI>.

operate the orphanages in Christian ways, such as teaching the children Christian hymns and the Bible and leading them to Christ, they do not apply for the support and approval from the local governments. Sometimes they have to run away from the investigation of the government.<sup>111</sup>

### Connection with Christian Mysticism

Chinese charismatic evangelicals stress personally experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit. Like mystics, they are highly conscious of mystical experiences such as healing miracles, vision, prophecy, ecstasy, and exorcism. Furthermore, they tend to witness to the work of the Holy Spirit through these appealing mystical experiences because they hold that the message of the gospel manifests the divine power through these experiences.

These evangelicals are facing some similar issues that the mystics have encountered at the early stages of the spiritual journey. First, charismatic evangelicals are attached to mystical experiences that hinder them from moving further. They are impressed by the power of the Holy Spirit and put their faith in Jesus.<sup>112</sup> The mystical experiences play a mediatory role between them and Jesus. However, they cannot drink fully in the living water of Jesus if their hearts are devoted to mystical experiences instead of God solely. Only those who are pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8).

Second, they are immature in discerning the sources of mystical experiences. New believers are self-centered. As Bernard of Clairvaux says, the first stage of spiritual progress is love self for self and the second one is love God for self.<sup>113</sup> Both are self-centered. What they perceive as something beneficial to them is from their self-centered

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<sup>111</sup> See video *Shizijia*, episode 1.

<sup>112</sup> Mu, "Ruhe Kandai," para 1, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Bernard, *On Loving God*, 31.

understanding instead of God's perspectives. Therefore, without constant guided by God-centered teachings, they tend to receive the mystical experiences that seem to meet their assumed needs yet are not from the divine sources.

Third, they rely more on personal experiences than on the exegesis of the Bible for knowing God. Emphasizing a direct experience of God, they assume that the Holy Spirit is guiding them to understand the Bible because many of them have diligently memorized the Bible. Therefore, they consider their intuitive perception of the biblical passages as divine messages and legitimate interpretation. Furthermore, lacking theological education makes the situation worse. They tend to neglect to evaluate their intuitive understanding according to the exegesis of the overall evangelical community.

Learning from the life of the mystics, they may realize that they need spiritual maturity and transformation for more experiences from God. Knowing that the mystics have faced similar issues, they may seek to draw upon the possible solutions that the mystics have tried during the development of the mystical tradition.

#### **4. Chinese Evangelicals in Newly Independent and Open Churches**

##### The Immediate Context

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the communities of evangelical entrepreneurs and intellectuals, including writers, artists, lawyers, professionals, and scientists began to play an active evangelistic role in metropolitan cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, even though rural churches remain the main center of Christianity in China after the economic growth since 1978.<sup>114</sup> These groups of people have contributed to the

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<sup>114</sup> Lee, "Mapping Christian Networks," 72. In the early twentieth century, the countryside was the center of the Christian movement.

economic prosperity and cultural development in China since the 1980s. Many of them chose to establish independent and open churches with unique characteristics in the new political, religious, and social context, while some joined the other groups of evangelicals. These newly independent and open churches own or rent spaces in commercial buildings that are surrounded by entertainment facilities and offices for their worship services.

Newly independent and open churches have intentionally built up the doctrines, the institutional structures, the spiritual and administrative foundation for ecclesiological governance, and the strategic social participation of so-called “cultural mission.”<sup>115</sup> The churches organize theological education that involves overseas Christian educators. The members also take the initiative in learning by themselves through various channels, including international resources. Therefore, they have been under the profound influence of western Christianity. These churches do not belong to any denomination. However, many of them have appropriated Reformed doctrine and pietistic spirituality to their particular context.<sup>116</sup>

Many churches of this group are participating in the movement of making Christian faith public and engaging in peaceful protests against violations of the freedom of religious rights. They have influenced other churches in towns to follow their footsteps. This movement has attracted the attention of the government and overseas reporters, which affects how the government perceives them. The government particularly censors

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<sup>115</sup> Cultural mission refers to Christian responsibility in influencing and transforming society with their professions and citizenship.

<sup>116</sup> The main reason for them to embrace Calvinistic theology may be to meet the need for an enhanced ecclesiology, systematic doctrines, and the theological foundation for engaging in public affairs. See Chow, *Theosis*, 123. McGrath points out that Chinese theology should not blindly follow Calvin’s theology because the Chinese tradition of philosophy and rhetoric is older than that of the classical Roman tradition that has influenced Calvin. See McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method,” 37.

their relationship with overseas personnel and organizations to prevent infiltration by foreign forces.<sup>117</sup>

### Reading the Bible

Newly independent and open churches uphold the inerrancy of the Bible and the authority of the Bible over every area of the Christian life. Every church takes the Bible as the foundation of the faith. They refer to the Bible when they analyze traditional Chinese values, in particular Confucianism, and social practices. They hold that proclaiming the Word would not only bring lost souls to Christ but also promote a new ethical system in China's struggle for modernization. Thus, they usually connect with the analysis of philosophical perspectives, movies, popular songs, other social phenomena, and today's social crisis and news.

The intellectual evangelicals have a higher potential to study in the overseas seminaries than other evangelical groups because of academic requirements. Learning from overseas Chinese churches, they encourage interpreting the Bible by exploring the historical and cultural context and the grammatical meaning of the texts instead of spiritual or intuitive understanding of the Bible. They are trying to learn hermeneutics developed by westerners. However, they have not yet fully explored these hermeneutic methodologies, thus cannot understand the implications of the impact of these methodologies on the meaning of the texts. The purpose of acquiring western training focuses on nurturing pastors instead of equipping theologians.<sup>118</sup> Even when they advocate the necessity of training pastors majoring in counselling or exegesis, their

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<sup>117</sup> Hamrin, "Advancing Religious Freedom," 169–72.

<sup>118</sup> Xi, "Xie Wenyu," para. 4–5.

purpose is to serve the churches instead of devotion to academic study.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, an encouragement from the western to value a spiritual hermeneutics of the Bible is necessary so that they will not discard the legacy of spiritual interpretation; instead, they may bring it under a critique correlational dialogue with intellectual hermeneutic approaches.

### Prayer

The prayer life of this evangelical group is similar to that of non-charismatic churches. The intellectuals and entrepreneurs do not mind kneeling and praying on the floors of the churches. Their prayer requests are not limited to evangelism. Since they stand at the frontline confronting the government when it unreasonably deprives them of the right to religious freedom, they are facing constant government interventions in their life. Naturally, they pray earnestly to rely on God to confront the persecution from the government. They also pray for other churches who have been raided by the government. Thus, they build up a network of intercession because of suffering at the hand of the government. They also turn this situation into an opportunity to practice unceasing prayer. After the government shuts down some churches, they have to pray every day for God to provide places for weekly communal worship. When they have to divide the churches into smaller groups and hold worship services all over the city, they take this opportunity to fulfill the vision of becoming the watchmen for every road and every lane of the city through prayer.<sup>120</sup> Not being able to gather in one site, they come to realize the possibility and necessity of the presence of God all over the city.

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<sup>119</sup> Guo, “Zhongguo Jiatingjiaohui,” para. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Cui, “Muyang Linian,” para. 4–5, 8.

### Worship and Hymns

The worship procedure and style of the open churches are similar to that of the government-sanctioned churches. Usually, they spend a long time in the prayer section during worship services.<sup>121</sup> Some churches hold several Sunday worship services because they do not have enough space to hold a large congregation. However, they do not feel frustrated by limited resources. Instead, they take this opportunity to design different styles of worship services. Young people usually participate in the worship services with vigorous praise, while seniors go to those solemn ones. Worship hymns come from various sources, including western traditions, those used by charismatic churches and non-charismatic churches, and songs that come from Taiwan as well.

### Communal Life

Independent and open churches divide their members into small groups that they can gather at home for weekday communal life. They support each other whenever they are in need, especially when the government detains their members because of religious issues. They also support new groups, train workers, and carry out the missional vision together.

Some churches promote family worship or family altar, following the traditional exhortation to build up Christ-centered families. The family members usually sing hymns together. The church websites or other Christian websites provide them with a rich collection of hymns. They take turns to pray, read the Bible passages, and share exhortation and application in their life, particularly their family life.

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<sup>121</sup> Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 306–9.

### Life to Engage the World

Evangelicals who are intellectuals and entrepreneurs have many opportunities to interact with nonbelievers at their workplaces, demonstrating Christian values and spirituality. Their colleagues or partners can observe their faith in work ethics, Christian music and arts, and academic studies.<sup>122</sup> Some are attracted and converted to Christ.

Some churches are careful when they share their opinions on social issues and strive for more space for religious rights. They do not challenge the administration of the government. Instead, they have to affirm that they are offering genuine suggestions for a better and more stable society.

However, some churches do not hesitate to criticize the government for the harsh execution of religious regulations, safeguarding the constitutional rights of Christians. They compare their situation related to freedom of religion with that of western Christians.<sup>123</sup> They even travel abroad to meet those who share similar opinions, even the leaders of western countries.<sup>124</sup> They also invite the former democracy activists who become Christians to share with them, which have attracted some intellectuals and brought some to conversion. Because of these activities, the government may perceive that they are making a connection with foreign infiltrators even though they are purely considering making Chinese Christianity legitimate without the manipulation of the government. They would like to make protests for the rights of Christians to become part

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<sup>122</sup> Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 3, 253. As Noll advocates, Christians should integrate their Christian perspective in their professional work, including academic studies. It is not merely an academic exercise but a Christian life.

<sup>123</sup> Fällman, "Hermeneutical Conflict," 60.

<sup>124</sup> Lee, "An Update," 302. See also "Bush meets with Three Chinese House Church Leaders," para. 1–2. Hence, some evangelicals are concerned that their protest has a political intention that would cause the public accusation against Christianity. McGrath warns that any permanent alliance between the church and a political party or tendency will result in the church's losing the public credibility of its Christian identity. See McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 168, 173.

of the history of the development of Chinese evangelicalism and have prepared themselves for suffering when the government cracks down on protests.

These evangelicals are using online strategies to break through the geographic limitations and invite more people, home and abroad, to understand the current situation of these churches and their context. It also forms a support network amid their challenges.<sup>125</sup>

Hence, on their road to fulfill the cultural mission, these independent and open churches are facing two types of suffering. First, they suffer when they hold on to a simple life while living among those who pursue a secular life, to witness for God through their professional careers with evangelical virtues. Second, they are persecuted by the government because of their high profile in protesting for religious rights. The government repetitively interrupts their life, including church life. They may lose their job because of their tough attitude of holding on to their standing. Because of their religious background, their children may be deprived of some opportunities to win academic scholarships. In light of these tough challenges, they acknowledge the necessity of building up their spirituality by taking up the cross of Christ. With the cross, they overcome the temptation of the secular lifestyle of which their colleagues boast. Furthermore, the cross helps them endure the suffering imposed by the government. Taking up the cross is the daily spiritual practice to equip them for the battle, which is as important as the theological equipping.

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<sup>125</sup> Lee, "An Update," 301–2.

### Connection with Christian Mysticism

Evangelicals in this group may find a connection with mystical spirituality through their piety spirituality: a life devoted to know and love God through various venues, which include interceding amid persecution, making their faith public in work, and advocating the reign of God through social activism. Their devotion prompts them to embrace suffering as the necessity to fulfill their calling just as the mystics would do. One of the core aspects of mystical spirituality is the conviction that God reveals himself to us and demonstrates his power in specific response to prayer, an orientation of faith/trust, and the openness to see his response to our petitions. These evangelicals hold the deep conviction of God's nearness despite setbacks and persecution. They expect God to act and, in this way, their orientation to prayer and spiritual hope parallels that of Christian mystical spirituality. Another phenomenon making these evangelicals approach Christian mysticism possible is that many intellectuals among them are open to study Christian mysticism as one of the Christian traditions and from academic perspectives.<sup>126</sup>

## 5. Freelance Chinese Evangelicals

### The Immediate Context

Freelance Chinese evangelicals stay away from the churches. They consider themselves evangelical because those who lead them to conversion are evangelicals, or simply because it is their choice to take this direction. They have various reasons to stay outside the churches. Some may have a concern about the complex situations in the churches. Some may hesitate to join a church regularly because their particular identities restrict them from being present at public religious places. For example, those who work at the

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<sup>126</sup> Liu, "'Wenhua' Jidutu," para. 26.

state-own departments or companies may lose the chance of promotion if they make known their faith.<sup>127</sup> However, some of them eventually attend the churches. For example, Christian scholar Xiaofeng Liu dissociated himself from the churches and the rituals when he decided to follow Jesus;<sup>128</sup> however, he joined a church after he realized the importance of the church for the development of faith even though the churches are imperfect.<sup>129</sup> These evangelicals may have spiritual practices, such as reading the Bible, prayer, reflection, private small group worship, and personal evangelism. They also have access to Christian academic literature and Christian website resources for theological learning.

The degree of involvement in these practices varies depending on their devotion to faith and their life context. For example, university students have access to Christian groups on the campus; thus, they may be more active in their faith life. However, some new believers may demonstrate their fervour toward their new faith at the beginning but withdraw because they do not get promising support and guidance when they face challenges and crises. Furthermore, many freelance evangelicals are out of the reach of researchers. Keeping this in mind, therefore, I try to explore some characteristics of these freelance evangelicals with the available resources.

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<sup>127</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 46.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander Chow notes that Liu uses the language of Ernst Troeltsch to claim that he is a member of the “mystical” church. See Chow, *Theosis*, 71.

<sup>129</sup> Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 58. It takes time for scholars to realize the limitation of the academic study on Christianity conducted by nonbelievers. Stackhouse states that “[t]heology . . . was no mere intellectual exercise, let alone a full-time profession that even unbelievers could undertake.” See Stackhouse, “Evangelical Theology,” 51. The essential role that the churches play in the development of the believers may not relate to sacraments and rituals. As Bloesch notes, sacraments and liturgy are not vital in the life of faith for the resolution of the crisis of spirituality. See Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 31, 59.

## Reading the Bible

Usually, freelance Christians find it hard to start reading the Bible if nobody guides them. Whereas, some freelance evangelicals have a sense of urgency to seek daily guidance from the Bible, especially when they are in crisis and need to make life decisions. Because they do not attend services at church, they read the Bible either by themselves or by joining some Bible study groups. They learn how to interpret the Bible by reading commentaries and surfing the internet for seminars and resources. In their situations, they are easily attracted by the teaching that the Holy Spirit will lead them into the Truth (John 16:13). Therefore, they are open to the experience of direct encounters with God and the spirits as well.<sup>130</sup>

## Prayer

Prayer usually is closely related to the personal Bible study as a practice of devotion. Devotional practices in Chinese, 灵修 (*Lingxiu*, spiritual practices), connotes its aim at the formation of mature spirituality. A study in 2008 shows that many university students often pray or practice prayer every day. However, it does not disclose their disposition and approach to prayer.<sup>131</sup> Many freelance evangelicals follow the traditional teachings on prayer that emphasizes petition and intercession. However, the perception that prayer as a life of walking with God becomes more acceptable, which indicates an openness to a broader understanding of prayer as a connection with God instead of merely talking to God and requesting God to do something.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Shengdao, "Sheng de Dian," para. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Tang, "Sange Jidutu Qunti," para. 13.

<sup>132</sup> Zhang, *Jielu*, chapter 12. Zhang's book has been uploaded at some Mainland Chinese Christian websites that uphold the gospel.

### Worship and Hymns

The personal worship or group worship of freelance evangelicals tends to be non-formal and without structures. It is easy for them to express their feeling of love toward God and open to the promptings from the Holy Spirit. Some groups, including university students, usually form worship teams and sing contemporary hymns in worship services, following the example of the evangelical churches.<sup>133</sup>

### Communal life

Away from the church, some freelance evangelicals feel the need to form groups for fellowship. They realize that they cannot have the same relationship with their non-believing friends as before they become believers. Fellowship provides support for them to hold to their faith. Some of them encourage each other to preach the gospel to their family members. Then they can have a family gathering to strengthen their faith life. A frequently quoted biblical verse to support their practice is “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matt 18:20 NASB).<sup>134</sup> When someone takes up the role of leading the groups, it would possibly evolve to home churches. However, since these evangelicals are concerned about the complexity of a church, such groups usually stay small and non-formal.

### Life to Engage the World

Freelance evangelicals demonstrate various degrees of engaging in the world for witnessing to the faith. Some hesitate to disclose their Christian identity, while some

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<sup>133</sup> Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict,” 61.

<sup>134</sup> Shengdao, “Sheng de Dian,” para. 1.

enjoy sharing their faith in word and deed without considering the stigma or the burden related to the church. University students get to know the gospel through their Christian fellows, foreign Christian teachers, and the missionaries working on their campus. Since one of the characteristics of young adults in universities is pursuing the meaning and value of their life, one of the main reasons for them to choose the faith is to love others motivated by God's love.<sup>135</sup> Before the government tightly monitors the religious background of university students, these young people were active in evangelizing their not-yet-believing classmates by reading the Bible together and sharing their testimonies with them. They also often engaged in voluntary social work in hospitals and non-profit organizations.

#### Connection with Christian Mysticism

Away from institutional churches, these freelance evangelicals desire a direct and personal encounter with God, which connects them with mystical spirituality. Some of them usually turn to literature and online resources for guidance, including overseas resources. University students also open a window to approach mystical spirituality. Lambert suggests that we should make the plan from a long-term and global perspective, linking with the ministry of overseas Chinese students to nurture their spirituality.<sup>136</sup> These students are fluid in their formation of spirituality, without being bound by established doctrines and practices. They are open to the spiritual realm if they are guided by a trustworthy source. Liu comments that these highly educated believers, who are not bound by institutions and structures, demonstrate a mystical tendency and promote such

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<sup>135</sup> Tang, "Sange Jidutu Qunti," para. 13.

<sup>136</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 221.

an inclination because they regard the religious piety as the source of creativity for their career and their life as well.<sup>137</sup>

## 6. Summary

Chinese evangelical spirituality appears to be an experiential life with earnestly seeking and responding to God's work within/among/around them. On the one hand, Chinese evangelicals commit themselves to the Christian life, getting actively involved in evangelization and church planting amidst the suppression from the government. They also sustain a living faith by frequently reading the Bible and earnestly praying to God in daily life.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, they strive to create venues for communal life, especially corporate worship. On the other hand, they live in a context that many Christians are under the influence that the "gospel" of prosperity, success, and health attracts a large number of people.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, they need to strive to distinguish evangelicalism from liberalism, Chinese classical traditions such as Confucianism and Daoism, and the folk religions.<sup>140</sup> Against the challenges, Chinese evangelicals work to advance spiritual development to fulfill their commitment. This dissertation proposes a selective appropriation of mystical spirituality for the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality.

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<sup>137</sup> Liu, "'Wenhua' Jidutu," para. 15.

<sup>138</sup> Fällman, "Hermeneutical Conflict," 63.

<sup>139</sup> Lee, "An Update," 303, 304.

<sup>140</sup> Many outsiders tend to conclude that all religions are similar when they observe some similarities in some areas of appearance among these religions.

## Mystical Elements

I have analyzed how each Chinese evangelical group connects with mystical spirituality. This section provides a summary of the mystical elements from a holistic perspective that makes a connection between Chinese evangelicalism and Christian mysticism. When these Chinese evangelical groups work together to promote spiritual development through appropriating mystical spirituality, these mystical elements are the stepstones for them to start the exploration of mystical spirituality, knowing more about it and drawing more upon it.

First, Chinese evangelicals seek the presence of God. They try to make sure that God is working among them, indicating that they are worshipping a living God instead of self-worship, which they try to avoid. Therefore, sophisticated beliefs and practices regarding the presence of God, which mark Christian mysticism, are the appealing reasons that they attempt to encounter mystical spirituality.

Second, Chinese evangelicals desire an intimate relationship with God. They embrace “union” that connotes a relation between personal beings, which expresses their desire for a direct encounter with God. They are eager to experience the transformation from Chinese traditional “union with impersonal heaven” to Chinese evangelical “union with the living God.” Mystical spirituality manifests various perspectives of union with the living God, which may inspire each evangelical group to find how God demonstrates his distinctive grace of communion among them.

Third, Chinese evangelicals pursue spiritual maturity. The rapid growth of the number of believers urges Chinese evangelical leaders to follow the teaching of the Bible to exhort all the believers to pursue spiritual maturity. The enormous needs of pastoring

and evangelization demand the active participation of all the believers instead of solely the leaders. Each evangelical group can develop their spiritual strengths, such as the victory over sin, good character, effectiveness in evangelism, active involvement in social concern, illumination of God's Word. Whereas they still need strategic, theological, or philosophical guidance and practice for leading all their members on the spiritual journey. Mystical spirituality has a distinctive development to promote spiritual progress, which may meet Chinese evangelical's needs.

Fourth, Chinese evangelicals are cautious of the tendency to separate prayer and action. They stress the importance of prayer. Many acknowledge that God's intervention, which shows that God answers prayer, may indicate that humans do not contribute to the outcome of what they pray. They are concerned that when believers rely on God's intervention, they may become idlers. Therefore, some Chinese evangelicals stress on active service while neglecting prayer. Mystical tradition has faced criticism that they value contemplation more than action. However, careful examination discloses that authentic mystical spirituality never abandons compassionate action that is a response to the authentic divine presence. The inseparability of prayer and loving action in mystical spirituality deserves Chinese evangelicals to take a close examination of its spiritual legacy.

Fifth, Chinese evangelicals encounter abundant mystical experiences. They have experienced abundant miracles of various types. Because the Bible records similar mystical experiences, they do not deny their existence and have no problem regarding them as the manifestation of God's power. However, they have little research on these mystical experiences. Meanwhile, they have not yet developed theological instruction to

help evangelicals to engage in pursuing and interpreting mystical experiences. Because Chinese evangelicals are learning to distinguish Christian mystical experiences from non-Christian ones, they can benefit from mystical tradition because of its development and related researches in this area.

Sixth, Chinese evangelicals embrace suffering, a mark of Christ's life. They perceive enduring affliction as obeying the teachings of Christ. They may find their attitude toward suffering resonant with some medieval mystics' identifying with the passion of Christ. The love of Christ demonstrated in his sacrifice negates the impression that God is absent in suffering, which is a similar understanding of suffering for both Chinese evangelicalism and mystical tradition.

In summary, mystical spirituality, like an expert in demonstrating the most deepened life in God, provides a crystal vision for Chinese evangelicals to appraise their mystical elements in their spirituality. Selectively appropriating the beliefs and practices grounded in the mystics' authentic walk with God, Chinese evangelicals would experience top-level spiritual guidance from the living mentors in Christian history.

## CHAPTER 4: RE-ORIENTATING CHINESE SPIRITUALITY TO MYSTICAL TRANSFORMATION

Drawing upon Christian mystical spirituality will boost a promising transformation for Chinese evangelical spirituality. One essential vision shared by all Chinese evangelical groups is preaching the gospel and bearing fruit for the Lord, even though each group has its distinctive characteristics. They realize that they are in urgent need to advance their spiritual maturity to fulfill their commission. Along with the development of Christianity in history, mystical tradition has projected a profound mystical transformation for those involved. Guided to acknowledge this reality, therefore, Chinese evangelicals will be open to a critical correlational dialogue with mystical spirituality.

This chapter explores the encounter of Chinese evangelical spirituality and mystical spirituality. The purpose of this dialectic correlation is to seek how Chinese evangelical spirituality can advance life transformation when it is cross-pollinated with Christian mysticism. Chinese evangelicals need to consider both the theological foundation and particular urgent needs to make the dialogue possible. As Schwanda notes, the theological foundation for the re-orientation of mystical traditions lies in the shared beliefs in the Triune God, reliance on Word and Spirit, the importance of the integration of head and heart, human brokenness through sin and God's initiative to redeem, the mediation of union with Christ, and ministry of compassion and social justice to those in

need.<sup>1</sup> Apart from these shared beliefs, each Chinese evangelical group presents different elements that connect with mysticism. When they practice appropriation in the real situation, they need to consider these elements as their entry points for encountering mysticism. Furthermore, each group has its most urgent needs in spiritual development that they would prioritize suitable motifs for appropriation.

This chapter organizes the mutual reflection of the five groups, respectively. It includes the discussion on how each Chinese evangelical group would resist mysticism and a possible resolution so that they can advance their pursuit of life transformation for preaching the gospel. Considering each group can inspire other groups to appropriate different areas of mysticism when they approach similar issues along the journey of development, this chapter avoids repetition of discussion on similar topics from the related angles that other groups have touched. In addition, the dialogue involves the seven core characteristics of mystical spirituality summarized from chapter 2: (1) the consciousness of the presence of God, (2) the pursuit of full union with God, (3) the progressive stages on the journey of union with God, (4) cataphatic and apophatic approaches, (5) the integration of knowing and loving, (6) the role of grace on the spiritual journey, and (7) Christ-centered or God-centered features.

### **1. Chinese Evangelicals in Government-Sanctioned Churches**

The contemporary spirituality of Chinese evangelicals in government-sanctioned churches does not have much resemblance to mystical spirituality. They may not feel the necessity to look into the mystical tradition that appears strange to them. However, if the

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<sup>1</sup> Schwanda, *Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism*, 40. Houston also stresses the importance of integrating head and heart through the right way of meditation and prayer. See Houston, *Heart's Desire*, 151, 156.

leaders pioneer an encounter with mystical spirituality, their experience can guide the group members to benefit from mystical resources. Furthermore, Christian communities have continued to examine mystical perspectives in history. They receive some mystical perceptions into the mainstream of their tradition right away. After careful examination, they also accept some mystical resources, which were perceived heretical years before. Therefore, Chinese evangelicals can refer to the reviews of these mystical perspectives when they draw upon these resources.

The core of mysticism, the presence of God, is the most likely reason that the leaders would explore mystical spirituality and consider selective appropriation. Chinese evangelicals need extra effort to guard against the tendency to neglect God when they pursue to be good. As Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells note, ethics is not merely about the real, the good, the external, and action. It is also about the relationship between devotees and the divine being because ethics is an informed prayer.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is not merely an impersonal action that abides by some rules or standards. It is communicative between Chinese evangelicals and their Lord. Chinese evangelicals are aware of this truth. They seek the divine presence in their actions, hoping that God would make himself known. However, the cultural context strengthens their tendency of impersonality in their ethical behaviour. Traditional Confucianism has influenced Chinese people that a transcendent god, 天 (*Tian*, heaven) or 上帝 (*Shangdi*, Lord on High) has granted all heavenly decree and all the virtue to all human beings, which demands them to respond to the rule by nurturing the acquired virtue and becoming sages.<sup>3</sup> When Chinese people

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<sup>2</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, "Ethics as Informed Prayer," 4–7, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Since Chinese people, including some Christians influenced by Confucianism, tend to uphold the moral standard and perceive Christianity as a religion that is also a set of ethical regulations, Christian

abide by the rules, they are responding to this impersonal god. Therefore, the decree becomes the focus, not heaven. Furthermore, there is no communication between the sage and heaven because the impersonal god is not communicative.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, heightened consciousness of the presence of God, one of the prominent characteristics of mystical spirituality can help Chinese evangelicals make a breakthrough to regard God as heaven. The presence of the immanent God is Jesus' promise to those who love him (John 14:21). It is experiential to all people with faith. David Granfield notes, as one can learn to love God more and more deeply, one can learn to be more and more conscious of his presence.<sup>5</sup> Hence, devotees can cultivate the consciousness of God's presence through some practices. Mysticism is sophisticated in providing such practices, including Christian meditation, to involve both mind and body in the intense awareness of God, which I will talk more about later.

Chinese evangelicals may identify the mystical consciousness of God's presence with mystical experiences, such as trance, ecstasy, and vision. They are concerned that these experiences may lead them into superstition or heresy because local cults and those who practice Daoism also claim that they have mystical experience. However, as In-sing Leung concludes from his mystical experience of Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity, among these three types, only Christian mystical experience moves beyond embracing the impersonal ordination granted to the universe into a personal relationship between the devotees and the divine being, which can only acquire after Jesus removing the sin of the

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mysticism presents Christianity as more than human effort striving to conform to the moral principles granted by the divine being. See Lamm, "Guide to Christian Mysticism," 11.

<sup>4</sup> Chow notes that contemporary Chinese people, including Christians under the influence of Confucianism, tend to focus on the optimism of human potential, and the synergistic cooperation between God and humanity but less on the discussion of divine monergism or inherited guilt. See Chow, *Theosis*, 128.

<sup>5</sup> Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 138.

devotees. He confesses that during his practice of Daoism and Buddhism, he encountered mystical experiences because of the intrusion of evil spirits.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, encountering Christian mysticism can actually clear up the confusion caused by mystical experiences from non-Christian sources, not mentioning that mystical traditions provide the exhortation of the discernment of mystical experiences.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, Chinese evangelicals need to understand that the goal of mystical spirituality is union with God instead of mystical experiences. Genuine devotees should request God's grace to set them free from being bound by mystical experiences. Detached from mystical experiences, they are probably able to look at these transcendent phenomena carefully before affirming their divine source. Thus, a more comprehensive understanding of mystical spirituality would clarify the confusion brought by a fragmented impression on mysticism.

Moreover, as Granfield notes, the heightened consciousness of God does not have to be an apparent mystical experience. Instead, Chinese evangelicals' awareness of God can be "minimally perceptible" that "might serve rather as the context of their dynamic life than as the explicit focal point of an interior awareness of God's presence."<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, Chinese evangelicals may have different types of experience from the mystics. They can pay attention to their experience rather than those of the mystics.

Regarding the approaches to cultivate the consciousness of God, the mystics acknowledge that various religions may have similar techniques such as manual labour,

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<sup>6</sup> Leung, *Mystical Experience*, chapter 6.

<sup>7</sup> I will talk about appropriating discernment from mysticism in the second and third section since traditional non-charismatic and charismatic evangelicals can benefit most from strengthening their practice of discernment according to the current situations.

<sup>8</sup> Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 143.

deliberate relaxation, ascetical deprivation, posture, and breath control.<sup>9</sup> And Christian mysticism do not reject these techniques if they are performed with true relation to God and grace.<sup>10</sup> However, as Karl Rahner notes, mysticism “can be conceived of only within the normal framework of grace and faith.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, even if Chinese evangelicals adopt Zen techniques, they would experience God according to their evangelical faith. However, because of the apologetic sensitivity, Chinese evangelicals would hesitate to employ such methods that would portray a wrong impression of them practicing other religions, like Zen. According to Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 10:23–24 (NASB), “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.” Hence, Chinese evangelicals should choose approaches with Christian distinctions. Because they uphold exhortation through the Bible, one suggestion would be *Lectio Divina*, which both the individuals and communities can practice. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger recommends *Lectio Divina* as one of the preliminary work for effective and faithful prayer, which may help Chinese evangelicals to ground in the Bible to culture their heart to avoid superficial prayer.<sup>12</sup>

*Lectio Divina* usually includes four steps, or four readings of one passage from the Bible. The first step is to know the script of the text. The second is grasping the multi-dimensions of the context involving the application of imagination. Then the third is to request prayerfully the divine’s involvement in lovingly knowing God’s message through the text. Finally, the fourth is sustainably know God in his presence and rest in his love. The first reading is preparatory. The second reading requires a pure mind and heart that

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<sup>9</sup> Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 120.

<sup>11</sup> Rahner, *Theological Investigation*, 94.

<sup>12</sup> van Deusen Hunsinger, *Pray without Ceasing*, 47.

can grasp the vision of the passage. The third reading is requesting the illumination of the Holy Spirit to disclose the divine message. During the final reading, the devotees enjoy the loving contemplative “gazing” upon God through the truth. *Lectio Divina* aids the practitioners to focus on God and know God through the Bible.

Another important reason for Chinese evangelicals to draw upon mystical spirituality is that the strength of mysticism in life transformation may help them face challenges when they seek to fulfill their missional calling.<sup>13</sup> They attempt to demonstrate their peaceful and caring spirit in a cosmic domain. They try to live harmoniously with family members, colleagues, and neighbours, whether believer or not. They also try to blend in within society by abiding by socialist values and standards for the exemplar of “good,” even though it may not be rooted in Christian perspectives. They work hard to present to the public that they are a group of God’s people who can live up to the standard of “good.” They think that if they were not “good,” they would bring shame to God, and then non-believers would deny God’s presence on earth. In their endeavour, they encountered the following issues. First, they tend to segregate action and inner life formation. Second, they are inclined to identify spiritual practices or obeying rules with a close relationship with God. Third, they rely more on self-effort than God’s grace. Fourth, they are easily attached to the material world.

First, Chinese evangelicals tend to segregate action from inner life. Criticizing that prayer without deed is a form of pretended piety, they try to live out righteousness through action. However, they segregate their work from the formation of their heart. Dallas Willard notes that the transformation of the outer life, especially of one’s behavior, is the natural result of inward Christlikeness. Quoting “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor

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<sup>13</sup> Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 64.

does a bad tree bear good fruit (Luke 6:43 NET),” he affirms, “[G]oodness comes from union with God, not apart from him.”<sup>14</sup>

Chinese evangelicals acknowledge the challenges when they struggle to live up to a standard. Looking to the expectation, they neglect to look into the process of empowerment from the indwelling Holy Spirit to meet the standard. Thus, they feel frustrated and exhausted when they appear to be good. For example, according to Chinese tradition, to be a good daughter-in-law is to be filial which indicates taking care of parents-in-law with respect to their habits and expectations.<sup>15</sup> However, with the generational gap, the tension between the daughter-in-law and parents-in-law is inevitable. If the daughter-in-law is an only child in their biological family, she would have to take care of her biological parents, parents-in-law, and children. Since each person has distinctive expectations, the daughter-in-law’s responsibility of caring becomes extremely challenging. She cannot be filial to her parents, while at the same time, take care of her parents-in-law, not mentioning the duty to her children. The life testimony of Guyon, a mystic, shows the Holy Spirit worked in her life that empowered her to overcome the challenge to be filial in her family life.<sup>16</sup>

When Chinese evangelicals realize the necessity of empowerment from the Holy Spirit to meet any standard of good, they may start to appreciate the practices of mystical spirituality that provide a venue for the work of the Holy Spirit. Guyon experienced God’s grace working in transforming her when she diligently practiced a life of prayer so she could withstand the “persecution” of her mother-in-law, who finally spoke well of

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<sup>14</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Zhou, “Xiaoshun Popo,” para. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Guyon, *Moyao*, chapters 10, 11.

her.<sup>17</sup> St. John of the Cross also noted that those who were actively labouring could benefit from their time spent on contemplation.<sup>18</sup> Chinese evangelicals understand the idiom that “a beard well lathered is half shaved.” They can learn from mysticism that prayer is more than a petition to God so God would do the job for them. Prayer life can be a journey to get closer to God and draw upon his holiness to transform their inner life, which empowers them to be good.

Second, Chinese evangelicals tend to identify spiritual practices or obeying rules with a close relationship with God. When many of them answer questions related to their relationship with God, they would say that they read the Bible or obey what the Bible asks them to do. They think what they do equates to an intimate relationship with God. They, first of all, have to deal with the problem of taking the means as the end. The heightened consciousness of God indicates that an experience with God is a personal encounter that involves both the devotees and God during these activities. Work expressed in diligent prayer, Bible study, reflection, avoiding sinful thoughts, and charity is necessary after conversion, especially for beginners. These expressions are both spiritual preparation and a positive response to God’s work. Therefore, a relationship with God includes not merely spiritual practices, but most importantly God’s interaction with devotees, without which devotees cannot say they have a relationship with God. Hence, spiritual practices are the means to a relationship with God that is confirmed to be authentic through a genuine experience with God.

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<sup>17</sup> Guyon, *Moyao*, chapters 10, 11, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 199. John Westerhoff has similar exhortation, even though he addresses to preachers and teachers. He says that single-minded attention to God provides our work with identity, vocation, and energy, without which the work would become rusted out and meaningless activities. See Westerhoff, *Spiritual Life*, xi–xii.

Then Chinese evangelicals need to discern whether their choice or practice of spiritual discipline can meet their ends. An authentic relationship with God or mystical union with God manifested in the life of the mystics involves the whole person of the devotees. Chinese evangelicals tend to neglect the practices that nurture their heart. They may claim that they have encountered God in reading the Bible when their intellectual knowledge of Christian doctrine increases. However, as C. J. H. Hingley argues, “The purpose of Bible reading is not finally to increase our intellectual understanding, but to bring us into a living encounter with Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, God’s words must penetrate “more deeply than the mind, to affect conscience, heart and will as well.”<sup>20</sup> Regarding prayer, Chinese evangelicals may argue that when they pray, they pray with eagerness and sincerity. Henri Nouwen reminds us, heart in the biblical meaning is not the place for emotion but “the central and unifying organ of our personal life.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, real prayer is the prayer of the heart that leads the soul to dwell with God; thus, it is more than an exercise with the mind, will, and emotion but from the heart, i.e. the soul.

Some evangelicals come to realize that some techniques are necessary to prepare the heart for an intimate relationship with God and allow God to renew the soul. J. I. Packer encourages the application of spiritual practices such as meditation that involve the mind but emphasizes the communion with God. He says, “It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God . . . as a means of communion with God . . . Its purpose is to clear one’s mental and spiritual vision of God and to let his

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<sup>19</sup> Hingley, “Evangelicals and Spirituality,” 87.

<sup>20</sup> Hingley, “Evangelicals and Spirituality,” 87.

<sup>21</sup> Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 73.

truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart."<sup>22</sup> Spiritual theologians do not ignore the practice of reading the Bible and prayer; instead, they suggest deepening these practices through some techniques enable devotees to exercise the mind in/from the heart or soul.

An authentic personal encounter of God through spiritual disciplines from the heart would set Chinese evangelicals free from abiding by the rules of model families, good workers, and good citizens set by society.<sup>23</sup> They are conforming to the authentic guidance of God, who may challenge these social rules. Mystical spirituality presents to Chinese evangelicals that morality is not adapting to the standard of society but pressing to divine perfection. As Jesus says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20 NASB) and "you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48 NASB).

Third, Chinese evangelicals tend to rely more on self-effort than grace. Influenced by Chinese traditional culture, they emphasize self-effort in character formation through education. However, according to Zichen Zhao, a Chinese evangelical theologian, Jesus discloses that a new quality is born out of communion between God and humanity.<sup>24</sup> Zhao also appeals to Paul's example to illustrate that Paul has experienced a change in character because of a "mystical union" with the Spirit of Christ. Resonant with Zhao's

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<sup>22</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> The evaluation of the "quality" family may affect the appraisal of the performance of the children in the schools. The government only approves the operation of five religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam. Some religious sects have to obtain legitimacy by affiliating with Daoist or Buddhist organizations. Otherwise, they need to present their practices as the preservation of traditional culture and historical relics. See Cao, "Raising the Quality of Belief," 55.

<sup>24</sup> Zhao, "Yesu," 665–66. Zhao was the former president of the Religion Institution of Yanjing University. He converted from Methodism to Anglicanism in 1941 because of his intensive appreciation of the ecclesial vocation. He was one of the first groups of leaders who joined the TSPM but had suffered persecution since 1951.

perspective, mystical spirituality stresses the integration of contemplation and action while putting priority in the former, through which they have experienced the flow of God's grace in various areas of their life, including the building-up of their character.

Moreover, the life of the mystics shows that God's frequent involvement in the relationship makes spiritual disciplines easier. As Teresa observes, the divine grace would gradually replace the effort that the devotees spend on spiritual disciplines to fulfill the role to attain an intimate experience of God.<sup>25</sup> Then, without much effort or struggle to strive for spiritual practice, the devotees begin to drink more showers of the living water. Therefore, the expression of loving and knowing God that comes from the flow of living water, demonstrated in human endeavour, becomes the fruit of the divine-Christian intimacy rather than human-originated effort. When Chinese evangelicals stress human effort, while neglecting God's involvement in the relationship, they feel weak in their charity even though they make a great effort for it. Therefore, Chinese evangelicals should make more effort to nurture the unitive relationship with God to acquire God's grace, even though they may not follow the exact approaches that the mystics adopt for pursuing communion with God.

Fourth, Chinese evangelicals tend to get attached to the material world. One of the challenges they face if they want to acquire life transformation is the attachment to the material world. As Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt 6:24 NASB). Many Christians say that they are making money for God, or they are becoming rich to witness God's blessings. Whereas, the spiritual reality is that the created human beings are naturally attached to the created

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<sup>25</sup> Teresa, *Life*, 104.

material world, especially wealth. Even though Jesus' salvific power has set Christians from the bondage of sin, they need to deal with their habitual or instinctive attachment to wealth and created things, as they experience the power of salvation gradually in the journey of union with God. Augustine notes that purity provided through the presence of God should become permanent for the soul to attain tranquillity, and the soul should strive to keep away from the defilement of sin.<sup>26</sup> As Teresa describes, the devotees would experience the enormous struggle over the attachment to materialism before entering the third mansion of prayer.<sup>27</sup>

One distinct element of mystical spirituality is its stress on the disciplines of detachment from the creatures, which is the authentic way of pursuing a realistic deep relationship with God. As Houston notes, one aspect of mystical spirituality is “to inject a spiritual protest against the materialism and empiricism of much modern secularism.”<sup>28</sup> Some mystics' life has manifested the realistic process of detachment. They have abundant property before they start the journey of union with God, such as Father Anthony, St. France of Assisi, and many others. However, some of them experience God's grace to renounce their wealth and leave their well-off family to live a life in the “desert.” Some of them experience God's grace by losing their fortune or offering a large amount of money to charity, even though they live with their wealthy family. Chinese evangelicals can practice what Gregory of Nyssa called “the internal discipline of the desert” and live a simple life that testifies to prosperity from a biblical and spiritual perspective.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *Greatness of the Soul*, 98–106.

<sup>27</sup> Teresa, *Interior Castle*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> Houston, “Evangelical Anti-mysticism,” 168.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, *Life of Moses*, Book II, para. 116, 132.

The inner tranquillity detached from consumerism is an authentic witness to the work of the Holy Spirit that many non-believers desire and cannot acquire without the work of God.<sup>30</sup> Along with the economic development of China, many non-believers assert that if they are prosperous in many ways and have a better quality of life than Christians, why they should accept Christian faith. They think that the believers are trying to convert them to a set of theoretical beliefs and ritual practices of Christianity, instead of a relationship with Christ, a living God. Therefore, Chinese evangelicals need to move beyond human effort, outward performance, and material prosperity to fulfill God's mission and evangelism. Mary Jo Leddy reminds us to meditate on the mystery of our beginning and God's love shown in giving us our life, which is the root of the great economy of grace that manifests in our radical gratitude and liberates us from being held captive by consumerism.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, mystical spirituality would show Chinese evangelicals the way to uphold God instead of human efforts and material means. As Underhill notes, humanity's consciousness of God can be so intensive that their relationships with any beings other than God could eclipse from their center of attention.<sup>32</sup> The authentic work of God is the guarantee for them to experience life transformation for leading people to Christ.

## **2. Chinese Evangelicals in Traditional Non-Charismatic Churches**

Chinese evangelicalism in traditional non-charismatic churches has many motifs that are resonant with Christian mysticism even though they have different foci in manifestation.

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<sup>30</sup> As Demarest notes, the devotees can have a glimpse of a rewarding life with and for Christ through recovering mystical spirituality. See Demarest, "Mysticism: Peril or Promise," 17.

<sup>31</sup> Leddy, *Radical Gratitude*, 50–56.

<sup>32</sup> Underhill, *Essentials of Mysticism*, 9.

Chinese non-charismatic evangelicals have a solid spiritual foundation for experiencing the effect of union with God. However, if they want to make a breakthrough in life transformation, they will need to make the instructions and practices for experiencing God available to all members, rather than relying on the leaders to play the role of mediators of the encounter between them and God. This section focuses on how the interaction with mystical spirituality can make such a breakthrough happen. First, Chinese evangelicals can present the progress motif as a road map for all members to pursue their spiritual maturity. Second, they can provide the instruction on spiritual discernment that all members can exercise discretion and become a discerning person with auxiliary guidance. Third, they can design structured spiritual exercises that all members can prepare for, witness to, and respond to the work of the Holy Spirit, both individually and communally.

#### Present the Progress Motif as a Road Map for All

Chinese evangelicals note that their spiritual journey starts when they are born again in Christ through the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> However, they are not sure whether they can have a direct experience of God as beginners. They have the impression that the spiritually mature leaders appear to have an abundance of experience in directly encountering God. Because Nee divides Christians into “the spiritual,” “the soulish,” and “the fleshly” and argues that only the spiritual understand the things of God, those who do not think that they have become spiritual easily waive the possibility of experiencing God. According to Nee’s definition, spiritual Christians are those who allow their spirit to conform to the Holy Spirit and lead them. Spirit renews the mind, the emotions, and the will and controls

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<sup>33</sup> Nee, *Quanji*, book XVII, 187.

the body. If Chinese evangelicals follow Nee's definition, many of them may doubt whether they can call themselves spiritual persons, finding that they sometimes do not follow the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they hesitate to affirm the privileges of experiencing spiritual things.

Christian mysticism's progress roadmap would help Chinese evangelicals to remove the fog that hinders them from pursuing the presence of God. As Teresa observes, those beginners who devote themselves to prayer may have received a direct experience of God even though they are struggling with purification from sin. And those who advance further in the journey, through divinely planned spiritual disciplines, would experience more.<sup>34</sup> As Granfield notes, even though some people may have extraordinary events involved in encountering God, the mystical experience of God is a natural development in the life of Christians who put their faith in God.<sup>35</sup> He argues that those who claim that mystical experience is God's grace for some chosen people have no support from the Scripture (cf. Joel 2:28). He also notes the claim of some mystics that they cannot control when and how they encounter God cannot prove that these experiences are so extraordinary that they only belong to some elites, because these mystics not being able to control their experience may be as ordinary as people not being able to control their thoughts and intuition.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, as was discussed in previous chapters, a spiritual pilgrim presented by Christian mysticism includes the beliefs and practices that involve the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to the direct presence of God. Therefore, as beginners start to put their faith in Jesus and pray, they may open themselves to the

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<sup>34</sup> Teresa, *Interior Castle*, 18–19.

<sup>35</sup> Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 140–43.

<sup>36</sup> Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 140–43.

experience of God even though they have not yet become spiritual persons by the definition of Nee. Knowing that they are among those people who have the privilege of God's promise and grace, they may be motivated to advance further and prepare themselves for more experiences.

A description of the core characteristics at different phases of the spiritual journey can help devotees intentionally deal with their particular issues. The roadmap of mysticism presents the features of different stages from various perspectives. Augustine focuses on the progress of attention on God until it reaches recollection of God as the sole object. Richard of Victor focuses on the progression of knowing the Truth and forming virtue through and beyond imagination and senses. Teresa emphasizes that the devotees' prayer life should progress until they acquire the status that they would never be set apart from God like the relationship between a bride and a bridegroom in marriage. Even though the mystic may present their angles with their distinctive metaphors, they show that there appears to be some core characteristics in different phases of the spiritual journey. Thus, Benedict Zimmerman, a Prior, summarize in the introduction for *Interior Castle* that Christian mysticism "is generally divided into three parts, respectively called the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive life."<sup>37</sup>

Mulholland shows an example to appropriate the stage motif of Christian mysticism from an evangelical perspective. To emphasize that the beginning of the spiritual journey starts at the spiritual rebirth, he adds an important stage—the stage of awakening—to purification, illumination, and union. Devotees awaken to God's call to an intimate relationship with God.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Mulholland avoids the misunderstanding that

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<sup>37</sup> Teresa, *Interior Castle*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, expanded version, 122–25.

any appropriation of Christian mysticism connotes universal salvation or salvation by works. Spiritual progress without mentioning the salvation by Jesus at the beginning may lead to a belief that whoever pursues and practices prayer can achieve full union with God. Meanwhile, spiritual progress emphasizing spiritual disciplines instead of Jesus' redemption may cause confusion that salvation can be acquired by work. Mulholland's approach removes a core hindrance to draw upon the insights provided by the mystical stage motif.

Chinese evangelicalism has not yet developed their study on the spiritual journey in term of "phases." In *The Spiritual Man* and *The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit*, Nee describes the working of the Holy Spirit and Satan in the spirit, the soul, and the body, the relationship among them, and the demonstration in everyday life.<sup>39</sup> Devotees may learn how to respond in some situations to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit while resisting the work of Satan. However, Nee's description does not systematically provide instructions for the devotees in different periods of growth to get them more prepared for what they may encounter in their stage. The stage perspective of mystical theology presents the main characteristics and challenges of different stages so that devotees can intentionally tackle the main spiritual issues accordingly. Even though Chinese evangelicals may discover that their journey presents features that are different from mysticism, or they may find it more appropriate to use their metaphors in their

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<sup>39</sup> Wu notes that "there seems to be a consensus among some scholars to view spirit, soul, and body as representing different functions or orientations of the holistic human person." He concludes that "while recent biblical scholarship does not support a hard version of Nee's tripartite anthropology, it does seem to allow for a soft version of it—maintaining a linguistic and functional distinction between spirit, soul, and body without insisting on an ontological identification or separation of each." See Wu, *Understanding*, 120.

context, the stage approach of mysticism can inspire Chinese evangelicals to consider a similar pathway for future development.

The mystical works on the spiritual stages enrich Nee's presentation of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person from another angle. For example, in *The Interior Castle*, Teresa presents to devotees what they should pay attention to and deal with efforts according to the stages of the journey of union with God. She advises beginners to deal with some core problems to make progress and tells them what may lay ahead of them after the breakthrough. One of the most beneficial insights is that she points to the fact and the reasons that many devotees stay at the third mansion, which may awaken these devotees to strive and move forward. Teresa also makes it clear that when the devotees reach the final stage of the union, they will experience full joy, and at the same time, sorrow found in the suffering of Christ.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is in accordance with Chinese evangelical spirituality that the pilgrim is not for self-happiness but union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Furthermore, the stage perspective does not prove that the insight from Nee is wrong. According to the life experience of devotees, they cannot classify the phenomena along the journey into rooms and mansions with clear boundaries. Nevertheless, Teresa's description still presents an idea of the core characteristics on some main periods of the spiritual journey. Moreover, the reminder and exhortation on not staggering in one mansion but proceeding forward for a more intimate relationship with God are essential for Chinese evangelicals to attain what they pursue.

When Chinese evangelicals examine the stage motif presented by mysticism, they may resist some perspectives of the mystics at each stage. During the beginning stage that some mystics call purification, the mystics may stress the necessity of asceticism for

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<sup>40</sup> O' Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 101–2.

purifying sins. However, Chinese evangelicals regard the cross as the real efficacious power for dying to oneself. They lead an ascetical life to show the result of dying to oneself rather than as the practice to purify sins. Whereas, Underhill presents her understanding of asceticism for the true mystics that it is a “training in the art of recollection; the concentration of thought, will, and love upon the eternal realities which we commonly ignore.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Chinese evangelicals can perceive the purpose of purification is to make it a permanent status of turning away from non-God to God, which Augustine calls tranquility.<sup>42</sup>

In the next stage, the mystics experience mental and emotional enhancement.<sup>43</sup> During the encounter, the mystics have an intensive awareness of beauty, love, and enlightenment from divine illumination. Some mystics emphasize mutuality as they feel the love flow between them and God. Not good at emotional expression, Chinese evangelicals may feel comfortable stressing the renewal of their thought, character, and will because of the divine illumination shedding upon understanding the Bible passages.<sup>44</sup>

The roadmap of mysticism also presents a clear goal of full union with God. Even though Chinese evangelicals exhort that Christians should leave the beginning and proceed to sanctification until perfection, many Chinese evangelicals cannot articulate what perfection is and whether they can acquire it during their life on earth. Because of such ambiguity, they cannot set a goal for their spiritual growth. Christian mysticism presents a roadmap with a goal to manifest the relationship with God and the full effect of

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<sup>41</sup> Underhill, *Essentials of Mysticism*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *Greatness of the Soul*, 98–106, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Underhill, *Essentials of Mysticism*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Wu comments on Nee’s view on illumination or the direct teaching from the Holy Spirit on the Scripture: “for Nee, the word of God for today must necessarily come out of the Bible; otherwise, it would be heretical. Thus in this sense, Nee remains faithful as an heir of the Reformation, for like Calvin, Nee upholds the necessary bond between the Spirit and the Scripture.” See Wu, *Understanding*, 91.

the experience of union with God that mystics can acquire during their life on earth. However, some mystics confess that many mystics cannot move to the stage of full union with God, where devotees encounter God beyond mind and images. Since Chinese evangelicals uphold that knowing God cannot surpass the revelation of the Bible, they have a hard time imaging how they can know the Bible without mind and words as images. Whereas, if intellect and images are the tools for communication and understanding, they will be at rest when devotees acquire knowing. Devotees may understand God beyond words. Their knowing God does not contradict to the Word but is based on the Word and beyond biblical texts.

Chinese evangelicals may not understand what the mystics propose as the final stage of union with God if they cannot appreciate the apophatic approach in knowing God. The perspective of the apophatic approach deals with the detachment from created things, including experience and words. With negation, devotees move beyond what they have already known God through created images and experiences, stressing that God is still unknown compared to the known scope.<sup>45</sup> The constant consciousness of facing the hidden God and the desire to know God more always make the devotees humble. Chinese evangelicals stress detachment from the material. However, they generally lack applying the concept of detachment to the experience of knowing. The systematic elaboration of mystical theology on the broader perspective of detachment through negation can benefit the further growth of Chinese evangelicals.

Therefore, with the apophatic perspective in mind, Chinese evangelicals can be more open to mystical experiences and experience a more powerful work of the Holy Spirit, especially of knowing God beyond words. However, they are right to remain

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<sup>45</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 45.

skeptical about some mystical experiences and messages that are not in accordance with Chinese evangelical characteristics; for example, the vision of Mary and the related miracles, led to the syncretistic worship of Mary with some local goddess.<sup>46</sup> Because of the complexity of mystical experiences, Chinese evangelicals should carefully discern and identify the right understanding of authentic mystical experiences and mystical perspectives that the Bible and the Holy Spirit endorse.<sup>47</sup>

The union of God and devotees also touches the composition of a devotee as a holistic person, which is an issue related to anthropology. One topic is related to the inner dwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Some mystics regard the indwelling of Christ as the birth of Jesus in the soul.<sup>48</sup> Chinese evangelicals prefer biblical language: the indwelling of Christ in the devotees through the Holy Spirit. The former gives the impression that spiritual growth is the growth of Christ in the soul, while the latter focuses on the growth of the new life because of the indwelling Christ. The latter, however, does not explain how the reborn soul becomes the life of Christ. Neither does it answer the question of whether the indwelling Christ changes the nature of the soul.

Another topic relates to the implication of the devotees' participation in the divine nature, which the inner dwelling of God brings. Some mystics claim participation implies that human beings share a divine nature like Jesus.<sup>49</sup> Some apply the language of

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<sup>46</sup> For example, according to Catholic accounts, the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego several times, asking him to build a church to honour her as The Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary of Guadalupe, and proved her authenticity through performing several miracles. It is said that Our Lady of Guadalupe is connected to the indigenous goddess, the Aztec Divine Earth Mother Tonantzin. Worshipping Our Lady of Guadalupe became extremely significant in the life of Mexicans.

<sup>47</sup> When mystical experiences are understood as solely the experiences of a direct union between humans and God or divine beings, such as ecstasy, the Roman Catholic Churches do not accept the authenticity of mystical experiences because they do not believe in the possibility of such a direct union. See Paper, *Mystic Experiences*, 118.

<sup>48</sup> As in Eckhart's perspectives. See Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Mysticism*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> As in Al-Hallaj's assertion related to his ecstasy. See Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Mysticism*, 46.

absorption when they think the term participation is too weak to describe the degree of the union. Evangelicals are concerned about whether such statements indicate a change of the soul from human nature to the divine nature, which is not in accordance with evangelical theology.<sup>50</sup> Of course, some perspectives do not involve a change of substance. For example, Alexander Chow notes that Eastern Orthodox regards participation or deification as self-cultivation to “move away from sins and toward the divine likeness that was first intended for [humanity].”<sup>51</sup> John Zizioulas from Eastern Orthodox tradition elaborates from an ontological perspective that communion with God, who is (three) Person(s), is a necessity for a person/ecclesial being to be a real being as a person/ecclesial being. Furthermore, he stresses that communion is more than about what changes in a person but the fellowship between God and the collective devotees.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, mystical theology on participation can enrich Chinese evangelicals’ understanding of communion between God and the devotees, not only from an individualistic perspective but also from an ecclesial perspective.

Even though Chinese evangelicals do not accept any claim on the change of the devotees’ nature, mystical theology on participation or deification can prompt Chinese evangelicals to realize that the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit does bring a

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<sup>50</sup> As in Athanasius’ statement, “For He was made man that we might be made God.” Even though it stresses that without the incarnation, the deification is impossible, some scholars such as Maximus tend to understand deification as becoming all that God is while claiming that the union is not an ontological unity. Chow notes that the Byzantine understanding of union by grace is participation in the divine nature without transforming the human essence to the divine essence. See Chow, *Theosis*, 146. However, people who equate nature with essence may feel confused by such claims. Al-Hallaj seems to assert the divinity of humanity in essence, “[y]our Spirit mixes with mine, as wine is mixed with water.” One of the explanations to Al-Hallaj assertion is that in his ecstasy, he does not distinguish between the divine attributes and the Divine Essence. Thus, it is not a theological assertion. See Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Mysticism*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Chow, *Theosis*, 133–37. According to Chow, Eastern Orthodox distinguishes the image from the likeness. After the fall, the image such as will and mind is not corrupted. Therefore, humanity can exercise free will to commit to deification, to say no to sin that restores the divine likeness. Whereas, Eastern Orthodox acknowledges the crippled humanity. Thus, it stresses seeking Christ and depending on God’s grace for deification and perfection in moral lives.

<sup>52</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 20–25.

fundamental change to the devotees. Furthermore, one may explore further whether evangelicals should develop an anthropology that perceives a Christian as a holistic entity of spirit, soul, body, and Christ through the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> When Nee describes how the Holy Spirit works to conform the spirit, then the soul and the body, he appears to segregate the indwelling Holy Spirit and the devotees,<sup>54</sup> even though he intends on perceiving the devotee as a holistic person.<sup>55</sup>

In summary, even though Christian evangelicals may differ from the mystics in constructing the stage motif of the spiritual journey, they can appropriate mysticism in various ways. As Underhill notes, the essential of different types of mystical experience takes the living Reality (God) as the center of consciousness and believing in the union between devotees and that Reality.<sup>56</sup>

#### Provide Instruction for Spiritual Discernment

Chinese evangelicals from non-charismatic churches are generally cautious about mystical experiences. To remove hindrance for members to pursue the full effect of union with God, leaders need to prepare them to face various types of mystical experiences that they may encounter in their life. Furthermore, a full effect of union with God connotes

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<sup>53</sup> Otherwise, from a dualistic approach, the holistic entity of a Christian includes the soul, the body, and the indwelling Christ.

<sup>54</sup> Chow notes that Augustine stresses the power of salvation for the regeneration of the whole being; nonetheless, Eastern Orthodox theologians such as Palamas stresses God's grace and initiative as the presence of God within devotees, to which they must respond, while perceiving that God has granted human free will, because creation is dependent on the current divine grace. See Chow, *Thesis*, 140. However, Chow's argument downplays Palamas' stress on the economy of salvation for deification that is the fundamental difference from non-believers. Every Christian, excluding non-believers, can receive the gift of the presence of God, including his attributes, his will, and his "uncreated light." Furthermore, God's will invites humanity to respond and participate in cooperation. See Chow, *Thesis*, 138, 143.

<sup>55</sup> One of the arguments for the trichotomous approach is that it has no intention of segregating the faculties of a person but to facilitate a clear description of the possible faculties to involve in the process of transformation.

<sup>56</sup> Underhill, *Essential of Mysticism*, 34.

not merely extraordinary experiences but also active participation in what God is doing in the world. Since non-charismatic evangelicals are not receptive to mystical experiences, they may not encounter many satanic works. Instead, they appreciate discerning God's will for their life. It is easier for them to embrace discernment as a way of Christian life. Simon Chan notes that a crucial aspect of discernment involves discerning God's will for one's life in a particular situation, and it is an ongoing relationship with God and loving him.<sup>57</sup> Resonating with Chan, Elizabeth Liebert notes that practicing discernment is to become a more discerning person who "increasingly able to notice where God is at work in the world and in one's own life, increasingly desirous of choosing the 'more,' and, God willing, increasing generous with one's own life in response."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, leaders need to teach and enable non-charismatic evangelicals to practice spiritual discernment, even though they may need spiritual mentors from time to time.

Chinese evangelicals can benefit from mystical tradition regarding the practice of spiritual discernment. Generally, Chinese evangelicals emphasize spiritual discernment on satanic works.<sup>59</sup> One of the influences come from Penn-Lewis and the Holiness movement at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup> Penn-Lewis' exhortation was a response to the revival context when people reported many demonic phenomena.<sup>61</sup> After comparing Ignatius' exhortation on the discernment with Penn-Lewis', Smith argues that Ignatius' exhortation covers a larger scope, including rational, preternatural, and affective

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<sup>57</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 200–201.

<sup>58</sup> Liebert, *Way of Discernment*, ix–x.

<sup>59</sup> Nee mentions the discernment between self-desire and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. See Nee, *Quanji*, 15. 86.

<sup>60</sup> Foster, from the Quaker tradition, reminds us that when devotees enter into the spiritual realm through contemplation, they should discern the source of supernatural guidance that may not be divine guidance. See Foster, *Prayer*, 157. Several of Foster's books, including *Prayer*, *Celebration of Discipline*, and *Streams of Living Water*, have been translated into Chinese.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, "Discernment of Spirits," 115.

dimensions besides focusing on demonic works.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, both Ignatian and Protestant spirituality acknowledge the after-effects of the genuine divine-human encounter are “authentic life change, spiritual vitality, psychological vigor, and fruitfulness in ministries.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Philip Caraman comments that Ignatian discernment is more appropriate for contemporary Protestant activity.<sup>64</sup>

Liebert also recommends Ignatian practice to strengthen the life of discernment through the areas of attendance, memory, intuition, body, imagination, reason, religious affections, and nature.<sup>65</sup> For example, she notes that contemplation on the person of Jesus, as revealed in the gospels, is the strongest ground for devotees’ discernment.<sup>66</sup> The main construction of Ignatius’ exercises is a meditation on Jesus; thus, it provides a solid foundation for a life of discernment. Another example is related to the employment of intuition. Quoting from Ignatius, Liebert argues that Christian intuition, involving in illumination, is to guide one’s grasping God’s words.<sup>67</sup> In short, she shows an example to draw upon Ignatius’ wisdom in discerning daily choices to glorify God.

### Design Structured Spiritual Exercises for All

Chinese evangelicals need an organized and structured spiritual practice, including meditation and contemplation, so that they can incorporate in their daily life a pursuit to union with God. Chinese evangelicals acknowledge that it is crucial to meditate on the self-examination of sin, the amendment, hell, the joy of the salvation, the praise for God,

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, “Discernment of Spirits,” 105.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, “Discernment of Spirits,” 111.

<sup>64</sup> Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> Liebert, *Way of Discernment*, xii.

<sup>66</sup> Liebert, *Way of Discernment*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Liebert, *Way of Discernment*, 74–75. Liebert quotes Ignatius’ narrative of a direct experience with God when he sat by a river, thinking about devotions, and suddenly understood many things. See Ignatius, “Autobiography,” 80–81.

and the life of Christ. However, even though Nee provides resources and organized retreat for the leaders, they neglect the necessity of spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines for all members.

Ignatian spiritual exercises on nurturing the inner life can provide a template to meet these Chinese evangelicals' needs. Ignatius' mystical approach is cataphatic and Christ-centered, which is easy and comfortable for many Chinese evangelicals to appropriate.<sup>68</sup> His exercises had been beneficial for his reformation movement in Roman Catholics.<sup>69</sup> Many contemporary spiritual leaders, including some evangelicals, have accepted it and applied it into their groups. It provides Chinese evangelicals with a practical guide to having spiritual solitude for weeks to build a profound spiritual relationship with God. As well, it allows the devotees to focus on dealing with some particular subjects that are necessary for making a breakthrough in their spiritual transformation. Furthermore, the design of the exercise is feasible for traditional non-charismatic churches, which usually are small-sized. Moreover, the Ignatian template allows flexible revision for the leaders of the churches to design the spiritual exercises to match their particular needs.

In conclusion, encountering Christian mysticism, Chinese evangelicals at traditional non-charismatic churches would first draw upon the stage motif of mysticism to present a comprehensive roadmap for encouraging all members to advance in their spiritual journey. They would also provide spiritual discernment and spiritual exercises to equip these members to make spiritual pursuit a reality in their daily life.

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<sup>68</sup> Ignatius's spiritual exercises were built upon meditations on Christ's life from the work of Ludolf of Saxony, which Ludolf of Saxony adopted from the early Franciscan tradition. Cousins, "Fourfold Sense of Scripture," 127.

<sup>69</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 75.

### 3. Chinese Evangelicals in Traditional Charismatic Churches

Chinese evangelicals in traditional charismatic churches have a root in both the non-charismatic tradition, especially *The Little Flock*, and the charismatic tradition, especially *The True Jesus Church*. They also accept training provided by leaders from Reformed tradition, such as Tian'en Zhao (1938–2004) from the United States.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the overseas charismatic movement has influenced these Chinese evangelicals that their spirituality demonstrates the core characteristics of Pentecostal spirituality.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, they tend to follow their charismatic leaders. Chapter 3 has addressed the similar issues shared by these charismatic evangelicals and some mystics at the early stages of the spiritual journey. This section focuses on how they might find it beneficial to draw upon mysticism to address these issues and challenges.

First, Chinese evangelicals with charismatic spirituality tend to get attached to mystical experiences. They stress that the work or the “fire” of the Holy Spirit indicates the presence of God in the ecclesial setting and society. They pay little attention to the psychological activities inside a person. Instead, they seek the particular work of the Holy Spirit in miraculous healings, prophecy, exorcism, speaking in tongues, boldly serving

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<sup>70</sup> Zhao participated in the establishment of the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong in 1965. He also established the Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong in 1978 and Christianity and Chinese Culture Research Center in Taiwan in 1986.

<sup>71</sup> Menzies, “Pentecostals in China,” 78; Bays, *New History*, 194. They uphold the authority of the Bible, the salvation in Christ by faith, and evangelism. See Menzies, “Pentecostals in China,” 68, 78, 79. They claim that they do not belong to any tradition or denomination because their belief and practice come from the Bible, especially the book of Acts. They even claim through the faith statement that they acknowledge the different views on whether Christ will come before or after the tribulation. Although they do not endorse any particular perspective, they will be alert and prepared for the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, they do not want to participate in political activities. Responding to the persecution of the government, they see from the Bible examples of relying on God to overcome the mistreatment. Having experienced support from God, they do not rely on any political power to expand the church. Furthermore, they oppose “the unity of the church and state or the intermingling of the church and political power.” They also oppose any activity that would harm the harmony of the people and the unification of the Chinese state. See Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 301, 302.

God, and enthusiastically praising and worshipping God. These high profile phenomena attract many people.

Attachment to mystical experiences hinders Chinese evangelicals from growing further in their spiritual journey. The attachment manifests in the attitude toward “holy” things; for example, they regard “holy” water as the symbol of the presence of God. When some evangelicals pray for the sick, they use “holy” water to perform rituals. Some even ask the sick to drink the water taken from the river where they got baptized. Others sprinkle water over the sick. Some of the sick who followed such rites were miraculously healed. These evangelicals explain that the water is the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Scripture.<sup>72</sup> Such rituals with water as the symbol of the Holy Spirit may boost the confidence of the sick, which is vital for healing. Many evangelicals do not oppose these kinds of practices because they do no harm. However, some evangelicals and outsiders perceive it as superstitious practices, especially in the context of popular cults. The “holy” water phenomenon is one example out of many that these Chinese evangelicals tend to seek for visible signs supporting the presence of God.

Being aware of mystical experiences is beneficial to alert the consciousness of the devotees to things that are beyond the material world. However, if devotees fail to know the divine being behind these mystical experiences and put their attention solely on God, these mystical experiences would bind them, where they cannot persistently turn away from the created things to the Creator and follow God until they achieve the goal. Mysticism not only provides Chinese evangelicals with a full picture of the journey but also offers instruction on the negation approach for practicing detachment; one of which is naked faith.

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<sup>72</sup> Menzies, “Pentecostals in China,” 81.

Even though mystics acknowledge the practical utility of the visible signs or things in the journey of union with God, they intentionally pursue naked faith as they move into a relationship that is immensely intimate with God. They avoid relying on any visible signs to prove the presence of God. Furthermore, they acknowledge the necessity of the absence of God for building up naked faith. For them, the consciousness of the divine hiddenness is another way of being aware of God, detached from any material support and even the previous conscious experience of the presence of God. As St. John of the Cross perceives, God may temporarily withhold the divine communication and appear absent to the devotees.<sup>73</sup> Seeking God solely, devotees need to put their faith on trial for its purity by allowing God to deprive them of his presence. Chinese evangelicals are inevitably facing the necessity of acquiring naked faith if they sincerely want a closer relationship with God and become more mature according to the biblical teachings. Therefore, they can benefit from the systematic exploration of mystical spirituality related to this motif.

Chinese evangelicals can detach from mystical experiences and material things by practicing attachment to Christ. As Michael Proterra notes, both Ignatius and Martin Luther demonstrate their thorough faith in the gospel because of attachment to the person of Christ.<sup>74</sup> Many mystics crave the presence of God by focusing their attention on Christ and his life, particularly his passion. The humility and love of Christ draw their whole persons away from mystical phenomena so that they focus solely on Christ. Since Chinese charismatic evangelicals uphold the work of the Holy Spirit, they can tighten the connection of the work of the Holy Spirit and Christ by asserting the biblical truth that

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<sup>73</sup> Payne, *John of the Cross*, 211.

<sup>74</sup> Proterra, *Homo Spiritualis Nititur Fide*, 57–58.

the work of the Holy Spirit is for the glory of Christ instead of merely for the benefit of the saved. Furthermore, as mysticism emphasizes, the incarnated Christ is the liaison between the created and the Creator. Attachment to the incarnated Christ prepares the devotees, who are naturally attracted by the created, for their ultimate encounter with the Creator, who is a Spirit.

Second, Chinese charismatic evangelicals are immature in discerning the sources of mystical experiences. They tend to perceive union with the Holy Spirit as union with God. They consider the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an initiation into the journey of experiencing the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, after they get baptized, they tend to regard powerful things that happen to them as the operation of the Holy Spirit, neglecting to discern the source of the miraculous phenomena. According to the Bible, human beings cannot mimic some works of the Holy Spirit, such as miracles of healing and exorcism, but Satan can. Chinese evangelicals have experienced both the authentic miracles from God and satanic works. For example, the leaders of *China Is Blessed Church* have witnessed many miracles after they uphold the faith and obey God, resisting the shut down of the churches. Meanwhile, they also hear Satan speaking through possessed persons, laughing at them when they attempt to give up operating the churches.<sup>75</sup> If they do not discern whether these phenomena are from God, they may not be able to follow God and resist Satan. Therefore, spiritual discernment of mystical experiences is more crucial for Chinese charismatic evangelicals than for those from non-charismatic churches.

Chinese charismatic evangelicals also need to acknowledge their tendency to regard the performance of human beings as the work of the Holy Spirit, for example, the

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<sup>75</sup> Menzies, "Pentecostals in China," 81.

emotional praising of God. It is not wrong to praise and worship God with emotion; however, it is not right to ascribe the work of mere humans to the Holy Spirit. Especially in the group meeting, the atmosphere can easily stir up sentiments.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, as Ignatius reminds, the evil spirit can produce good feelings but does not end up good.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, discerning the source of some experiences is crucial before they assert that God is present and working among them. Jonathan Edwards well acknowledges the complexity in discernment amid an environment filled with spiritual affections.<sup>78</sup> Since Satan dared to tempt Jesus by twisting the meanings of God's words, believers should be cautious at godly appearances. Therefore, discernment is essential to keep devotees following God's work, even though there is no absolute assurance of the sources, as Chan reminds.<sup>79</sup>

Chinese charismatic spirituality is distinct from mystical spirituality, even though both stress mystical experiences. The former stresses healing, exorcism, evangelizing, prophesizing, and praising. The latter highlights vision, hearing, ecstasy, stigmata, and others. Therefore, Chinese charismatic evangelicals may not resonate with the perspective that relies heavily on the experiences of the mystics. The field works of the mystical experiences of these Chinese evangelicals are necessary to appropriate mystical theology well to the Chinese context. However, according to Chan, devotees can find similarities in the theological criterion developed by Ignatius and Edwards for testing authentic spiritual experiences that lead to Christ-like attributes. Ignatius' criteria are

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<sup>76</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 141–42.

<sup>77</sup> Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, section 333–34.

<sup>78</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 70, 71, 110.

<sup>79</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 217.

simple and useful for Chinese charismatic evangelicals to remember and practice, which Chan summarizes as growth in faith, hope, and love.<sup>80</sup>

Third, Chinese charismatic evangelicals tend to know God more through experiences than the intellectual exegesis of the Bible if we take experience as alternative method of exegesizing. Like the mystics, these evangelicals crave direct experience of God. They tend to claim that they come to know God through mystical experiences. There is no denial of the possibility of knowing God through mystical experiences, as Steven Payne argues, contemplative consciousness derived from mystical experiences is a cognitive mode of experience.<sup>81</sup> However, what needs to be of primary concern is the content of cognitive knowledge and what kind of knowing God the devotees tend to gain from mystical experiences.

McGinn notes that critical cognitional and epistemological research on mystical experiences is under development. However, he observes that two themes dominate in contemporary discussion. The first is related to whether mystical experiences are religiously specific experiences or not. The second is the contextual study of mysticism.<sup>82</sup> Since this dissertation aims to hold onto Chinese evangelical identity, I adopt the position that the interpretation of mystical experiences of Chinese evangelicals should align with Chinese evangelical theology and the Chinese context.

Even though some scholars argue that mystical theory is a reflection of mystical experiences, others hold that theory inspires devotees to search for mystical experiences, fasten them, and legitimate them.<sup>83</sup> Because contemporary Chinese evangelicals, as a

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<sup>80</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 217.

<sup>81</sup> Payne, *Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 212.

<sup>82</sup> McGinn, *Foundation of Mysticism*, 320–26.

<sup>83</sup> Jonas, “Myth and Mysticism,” 328.

group of Christians, do not come into being from a theological vacuum, they are born with doctrinal messages. Therefore, I resonant with Howells that these theological messages guide them to seek direct experience with God and interpret what they experience.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, since these theological messages are in the process of development, these Chinese evangelicals should allow the insights gained from mystical experiences to challenge existing doctrines, while being cautious and allowing Christian traditions and communities to appraise these insights.

Therefore, Chinese charismatic evangelicals should train themselves to conduct interactive dialogues between experiences and theological perspectives. Even though they can learn from reformed tradition on theology and hermeneutics, they can also learn from mystical tradition to understand the mystical experiences because reformed theology may not be sophisticated in this area.<sup>85</sup> Because Chinese evangelicals highly regard the authority of the Bible, the first place for Chinese evangelicals to start is a mystical understanding of biblical teachings on the union with God.<sup>86</sup> Some passages of the New Testament deliver such messages. Alan Mitchell suggests three corpora of biblical passages to study on the union with God. He says, “For Paul, it is living in Christ and conformity with Christ. For John, it is the mutual indwelling of God and Christ with the believers. For Hebrews, it is journeying towards God while living in God’s presence.”<sup>87</sup> Of course, Chinese evangelicals, influenced by Zichen Zhao, notes that a proper

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<sup>84</sup> Howells, “Mystical Theology,” 45.

<sup>85</sup> Bloesch analyzes that classical mysticism stresses the source of revelation is through the birth of God in the soul. See Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 39. This analysis may be too simple. Many mystics diligently study the Bible and write commentaries. The God in the soul receiving the truth of the Bible can be an alternative approach to understanding the Scripture besides intellectual methods.

<sup>86</sup> Ewert Cousins explores the fourfold sense of the Scripture in Christian mysticism and its relationship with mystical experiences that bring about the transformation of the devotees. See Cousins, “Fourfold Sense of Scripture,” 123, 128, 131.

<sup>87</sup> Mitchell, “Mysticism in the New Testament,” 106.

interpretation of the Scripture requires self-transformation as a precondition.<sup>88</sup> If devotees want to understand rightly the authentic meaning of Paul's epistles, they need to have a character equivalent to the virtue of Paul, which involves the mystical union with Christ. In other words, they need to acquire mystical experiences to understand biblical teachings.

The mystical exegesis of biblical passages other than what Mitchell suggests can also help Chinese charismatic evangelicals to understand their intimate relationship with God, for example, exegesis of the Song of Songs. Chinese charismatic evangelicals are keen at composing spiritual songs, among which *Canaan Hymns* are well known. Many hymns express the close feeling of being with the Lord. More than fifty hymns praise the love of the Lord and friendship with the Lord. More than ten songs express the love of the singers for the Lord. The hymn "The Beloved and Me" expresses the intimate love between Jesus and the devotee using partial verses from Song 1:4, 2:16, 5:10, 7:11–12, and 8:6–7, as lyrics. The devotee prays to Jesus and listens to him in the "chamber." They also accompany each other after they come out of the "chamber" and go to the "field" and "vineyard." The mutual love lasts eternally. One distinct feature from mysticism is that Chinese evangelicals are more conformable using the wordings of the Scripture instead of other erotic expressions. What they can learn from the mystical exegesis of the patristic fathers on the Song of Songs is to be aware of what God is particularly working on inside them and transforming them. Ann Astell and Catherine Cavadini observe that when the mystical exegesis of the Song of Songs integrates with the intimate experience with the Lord, which is rich among Chinese evangelicals, it sharpens "the soul's awareness of its own virtuous transformation through the experience of Christ's love."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Wan, "Competing Tension," 109–11.

<sup>89</sup> Astell and Cavadini, "Song of Songs," 27–28.

Furthermore, Chinese evangelicals acknowledge that their understanding of the Scripture progresses along their spiritual journey, which they can understand through encountering the patristic exegesis. For example, Astell and Cavadini summarize that Origen understood the Song of Songs from three perspectives: the literal/historical, the mystical/soul, and the spiritual reading. The commentary written by Origen can guide devotees to move progressively from the literal (the form of a play) to the mystical (the church turning to God) to the spiritual interpretation (the individual soul embraced and instructed by Christ-like receiving ever-flowing streams).<sup>90</sup> Such a perspective integrates the maturity of single devotees with the ecclesiastical union with God, with which Chinese charismatic churches are well aware because they stress that all members serve together with gifts granted by the Holy Spirit and become one body of Christ.

When Chinese evangelicals approach the exegesis of the mystics, they need to be aware that many mystics develop theology on beliefs and practices of union with God based on the philosophical frames, with some psychological perspective and anthropologic analogy or metaphor, which includes the journey of moving from less intimacy to full intimacy. It may take a while for Chinese evangelicals, who do not creatively elaborate the expression of union with God other than what is recorded in the Bible, to readily accept the hermeneutical approach involving the philosophical and psychological perspective.

#### **4. Chinese Evangelicals in Newly Independent and Open Churches**

Chinese evangelicals in newly independent and open churches are rational, but they also receive mystical experiences such as visions and healings. Although these experiences

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<sup>90</sup> Astell and Cavadini, "Song of Songs," 29.

are not common among them, because they may doubt these mystical experiences, they rely on their leaders to embrace these experiences. For example, when one leader was in charge of leading a student fellowship, he saw a vision through a dream that one of the believers became as small as a worm and crawled into a bottle, then filled the bottle in a second. He instantly understands that God is asking him to establish a church instead of running the fellowship. He obeys God, and God fulfills the vision with the church growing to about one hundred congregants. The leader regards such an experience as 神恩 (Shengqi, a revelation from God). The congregants do not doubt it, out of their trust in the leader who established the church.<sup>91</sup>

Chinese evangelicals in this group are open to learning from western Christianity. Therefore, there is no problem with introducing them to formal education and research of mysticism if they find it beneficial for the fulfillment of the cultural mission. As a group of professionals, they may be interested in the motifs of how mysticism manifests in social activism and how they can conduct academic research on mysticism.<sup>92</sup>

Chinese evangelicals strive for more public space for Christians, including exerting their influence in politics. They protest against the violation of their religious rights and make their faith public. They also create opportunities to allow the world to hear their voice as they stand up for the right to religious freedom.<sup>93</sup> They can learn from some mystics on how the contemplative life empowers social activities.

For example, Howard Thurman, a mystic and a Baptist, gives his working definition of “mysticism” as “the response of the individual to a personal encounter with

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<sup>91</sup> Liu, “Chengshi Jiating Jidu Jiaohui,” para. 33, 45.

<sup>92</sup> Liu, “‘Wenhua’ Jidutu,” para. 26.

<sup>93</sup> The government may have a concern. If Chinese evangelical activists demand more rights, including civil rights, not only for themselves but also for other groups of people, it may stir up confrontations against the government.

God within his own soul . . . Such a response is total, affecting the inner quality of life and its outward expression as its manifestation.”<sup>94</sup> As a social activist, he says, activism “is not merely to improve society, relieve suffering, or end oppression, as important as these are, but rather to remove anything that prevents God from coming to himself in the life of the individual. Whatever there is that blocks this, calls for action.”<sup>95</sup> Thurman responds to the work of God in both personal experiences and social structures through participating in non-violent protests against racism. He regards it not only as his calling but also as the mission of Christian communities that he leads his church to experience, advocating for the transformed church to transform society. Through studying the life and work of Thurman, Alton Pollard affirms, “In situations of social unrest, mysticism may be a conduit for the articulation of dissatisfaction with extant social structures and for the introduction of innovations.”<sup>96</sup> Social regeneration is another pathway for mystics to demonstrate their mystical life as an integration of prayer and action, which may remove the misunderstanding of Chinese evangelicals toward mystics.

Outward action cannot prevail without inner quality. Mystical activists can inspire Chinese evangelicals to follow the footprint of God in the Chinese context, seeking to integrate their internal spiritual experience and outward social activities, not overthrowing the rule of the CPP, but leaving their mark in social regeneration. Against the social and political tide and enormous challenges, Chinese evangelicals advocate for the reign of God in an atheistic nation, which requires training in particular spiritual features. According to Mary Frohlich’s research, “stillness” is the prominent motif of a

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<sup>94</sup> Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Change*, 177.

<sup>95</sup> Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Change*, 245.

<sup>96</sup> Pollard, *Mysticism and Social Change*, 150.

mystic-activist.<sup>97</sup> Stillness, at the center where God dwells, is the foundation against pride, bitterness, drifting-along, and burning-out. Eastern Orthodox Christianity has developed its spirituality with a prominent feature of stillness through practicing *The Jesus Prayer*. Chinese evangelical activists can benefit from practicing *The Jesus Prayer*, which is simple yet profound for acquiring the spirit of stillness.

The content of *The Jesus Prayer* is in accord with the evangelical doctrines. Confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the prerequisite for salvation. Repeatedly asking Jesus to forgive sins resonates with the Chinese evangelical tradition that devotees, as sinners, should continue to repent of their sins in their daily life, even though Jesus has blessed them with salvation. However, since popular cults or other religions practice repetition of a spell, incantation, or the names of Buddha, people may identify the practice of *The Jesus Prayer* with that of these religions or cults, without paying attention to the content of the prayer. Thus, teaching people to focus on the doctrine or the proclamation of the gospel is one of the essential foundations for spiritual disciplines or practices.

*The Jesus Prayer* can help devotees to offer their mind to God for longer periods of time and express gratitude and love to God in their heart as well. As time passes, the habitual prayer becomes the constant and persistent disposition even when devotees face the persecution of the government and the resistance of the public. The continuous prayer contributes to the formation of contemplative spirituality.

Another significant component in the practice of *The Jesus Prayer* is breath and its rhythm. The connection of the message and the consciousness of God with breath makes the former inseparable from devotees, as they cannot live without their breath. The

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<sup>97</sup> Frohlich, "Mystics," 527–28.

practitioners, especially the beginners, may unconsciously adjust the rhythm of their breathing to the pace of prayer, which may cause cardio-respiratory problems. Therefore, some guidance to avoid this problem is necessary, such as helping the devotees to focus the practice on the content of the prayer instead of the rhythm of the breath. I have adjusted the content of *The Jesus Prayer* in Chinese to make the rhythm of prayer even so that I can easily keep the rhythm of breath at an even pace. *The Jesus Prayer* in Chinese is “主耶稣基督，上帝的儿子，求你怜悯我，千红这罪人 (*Zhu Yesu Jidu, Shangdi de Erzi, Qiuni Lianming Wo, Qianhong Zhe Zuiren*, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me, Qianhong this Sinner).” In Chinese, *Shangdi*, the King Ultimate, is another way of referring to God the Sovereignty or the Heavenly King. Moreover, at the end of the prayer, I add my first name to make it a personal prayer. Therefore, each of the four phases of the prayer has five Chinese characters. It is easier to adopt the rhythm of the breath evenly to the pace of the prayer, so that the rhythm of my breathing would not easily distract me. If devotees emphasize breathing, practicing *The Jesus Prayer* would easily be confused with the breath practice like some Eastern meditation.<sup>98</sup> Even though practitioners could benefit from a calm and steady rhythm of breath, they should stress the content of the prayer instead of the movement of the breath. The message of the prayer, along with the awareness of God’s salvific presence, becomes embedded in the life of devotees like their breath.

*The Jesus Prayer*, as a spiritual practice, is a means to prepare the devotees to receive the end—the genuine presence of God. The devotees express their desire and prepare their hearts through prayer, leaving it up to God to grant the gift of his work. For

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<sup>98</sup> Chinese intellectual evangelicals are aware of the New Age movement and are sensitive to any connection with it. Some may resemble the practice of breathing with those in *Qigong*, Yoga, or the New Age movement, thus resisting it.

Chinese intellectuals, reasoning and elaborate meditation are long-term built-up habits that are hard to change or they are unwilling to change. The instructors need to be patient because it may take some time for Chinese intellectuals to integrate heart and mind. These intellectual evangelicals themselves may feel the innate resistance at the beginning because of their mind-oriented life, even though they realize the necessity of heart-mind integration. It takes intentional effort from the very beginning to acquire the rest in God. As Brother Lawrence advises, as soon as the devotees are conscious of their wandering thoughts that are impertinent to their salvation, they need to reject it and return to their communion with God.<sup>99</sup> To acquire that effect, having faith solely in God and loving God with the whole being are the foundation. Then devotees start the practice of devoting mind and heart to God, first at private prayer, and then extend it to another time. Lawrence shares, “in the beginning of his novitiate he spent hours appointed for private prayer in thinking of GOD, so as to convince his mind of, and to impress deeply upon his heart, the Divine existence, rather by devout sentiments, and submission to the lights of faith, than by studied reasonings and elaborate mediations.”<sup>100</sup>

Devotees may experience a change of heart and mind progressively as they keep practicing *The Jesus Prayer*. It becomes easier to let go of some sinful habits or attachments, to realize and repent from their ignorance and hurt afflicted on others because of their sins or immature spirituality, and to praise God from their heart. Especially for the intellectuals, it becomes easier to tune into Christian perspectives even when they exercise their intellectual faculties. Furthermore, with a constant consciousness of God at the center of their mind and heart, Chinese evangelicals can be

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<sup>99</sup> Lawrence, *Presence of God*, second conversation.

<sup>100</sup> Lawrence, *Presence of God*, fourth conversation.

still, even when facing social turbulence. They usually expect persecution. The government may close their churches. The police may detain the church members. Their works may be under political supervisory control. Stillness can also prevent them from losing hope when they do not see the expected social progress, because being a group of marginalized people, these activists' effort to change society is like an ant moving trees.

Living in such an environment, some Chinese evangelical activists may embrace suffering and develop victim spirituality. As Frohlich notes, "The victim soul makes an oblation of herself to suffer with Christ to make up for the damage caused by human sin. While in theory, this is an acceptance of suffering rather than a seeking of pain, the fine line between the two is sometimes blurred."<sup>101</sup> Chinese evangelical activists hold a paradoxical attitude towards suffering. As followers of Christ, they embrace suffering as they identify with Christ's suffering and seek God's presence in pain. While, at the same time, they resist suffering because they identify with Christ's salvation and resurrection as a way to resist sin and death that cause suffering. Some mystics and evangelicals have concerns about whether they should find ways to relieve suffering. If they know that the affliction is from God, they submit to God's work. If it is not from God, they consider whether they should make an effort to alleviate it or remove the source of suffering if they could. Generally, as they advocate for the reign of God in their context to fulfill their calling, it may appear to others that they are seeking pain. In actuality, with an intensive awareness of God's calling, they are embracing suffering brought upon by carrying out their calling. The feature of such suffering is not merely finding God amidst suffering. It is more of an intentional movement from consolation to divine sorrow because of the calling. Devotees may not be high profile public figures. However, their contemplative

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<sup>101</sup> Frohlich, "Mystics," 517.

life reveals how they participate in God's work to bring about social regeneration. Their goal is "to seek [their] satisfaction only in fulfilling His will, whether He leads [them] by suffering or by consolation, for all would be equal to a soul truly resigned."<sup>102</sup> When Chinese evangelicals encounter mysticism, they may find many pilgrims in the world who suffer the same suffering with them. These evangelicals would enhance their inner light to embrace suffering in their context, even though they may not agree with those mystics who intentionally abandon their privilege of relying on existing resources to alleviate torment and uphold their faith in God.<sup>103</sup>

Chinese evangelicals at the open churches also bear more responsibility for the construction of Chinese theology, especially Chinese spiritual theology. As the bearers of the cultural mission, they are open to interaction with other disciplines such as the social sciences and psychology. However, unlike nonbelievers, who do not care whether Christianity would be at risk of being syncretized with Chinese sociology, culture, or psychological pursuit, they should uphold that the power of the gospel transforms Chinese culture or other disciplines for God's purpose.

Mystical theology provides rich resources for Chinese devotees to work on Chinese spiritual theology, which involves building on the biblical traditions, collecting the empirical qualitative data, and presenting the theology of Chinese spiritual life. Some Chinese evangelicals are concerned that mystical spirituality is a tradition of beliefs and practices for the elites. It is true that the intellectuals and the highly educated conduct these theoretic works. However, according to the comprehensive map of the spiritual journey based on mystical/classical spirituality, the reality of the spiritual journey is not

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<sup>102</sup> Huang, "Zhongshiji," 122.

<sup>103</sup> As in the example of Catherine of Genoa. See Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Mysticism*, 36–37.

merely theoretical speculation but real experiences.<sup>104</sup> Those devotees whose lives do not follow the spiritual ordinance cannot proceed further. The so-called “elites” are those who enjoy more scenes or views of the presence of God because they strive to advance in the spiritual journey. Mystical theology does not despise beginners but encourages and guides them to press towards the goal. It provides a rather clear view of the goal of the spiritual journey, acquiring a full reality of union with God or the presence of God, which has already been an ontological reality at the time of the devotees’ rebirth. The theoretic works cannot ignore the unitive experiences of those who may not have an advanced theological education.

In sum, because Chinese evangelicals carry out the cultural mission, they frequently run into persecution. Moreover, non-believers may not appreciate their works. However, when Chinese evangelicals try to make public the existence of evangelical truth among non-believers, they are like medieval mystics who shine as light in the dark even though the dark may not appreciate the light.<sup>105</sup>

### **5. Freelance Chinese Evangelicals**

Freelance Chinese evangelicals have not yet committed to church life. Most of them are new converts. For those who pursue a personal relationship with God, they usually access literature, including online resources, for guidance on spiritual practices. Therefore, if they are not acquainted with evangelical doctrines, they may misinterpret mystical experiences, especially when much literature promotes mystical intimacy with the

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<sup>104</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 79–80.

<sup>105</sup> Yieh, “Reading the Sermon on the Mount,” 155.

transcendent beings for so-called spiritual welfare.<sup>106</sup> Clear guidance is necessary, starting from the moment when an evangelical lead them to Christ.

I develop a list of the core characteristics of the presence of God in chapter 2, based on a survey of some key figures and works that contribute to the development of Christian mysticism. Some scholars also provide some general guidelines for understanding mysticism. Augustin Poulain, a Jesuit mystical theologian, lists two primary and ten secondary characteristics of genuine Christian mysticism. The principle features are related to the consciousness of the presence of God and its modes. The modes of the divine presence involve a discussion on the infused prayer that is totally beyond the ability of the devotees, thus solely the deeds of God, and the acquired contemplation, which is the highest form of prayer that all devotees can reach. He reminds the devotees of the feature of passivity when they experience the infused contemplation. The secondary characteristics cover several key motifs, including the emphasis on the grace of God and loving knowledge. Poulain also stresses the incomprehensibility of God's work, which is not the product of the imaginary, the senses, the memory, or the intellect. Moreover, he acknowledges that the intensity of the consciousness of God fluctuates, and consolation accompanies desolation. He notes that the psychosomatic effects of the presence of God are inevitable. Furthermore, he observes that the presence of God tends to limit the inner and outward activity of the devotees.<sup>107</sup> Poulain's list, along with other introduction on mystical experience and

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<sup>106</sup> Paper, *Mystic Experience*, 5, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Poulain, *Interior Prayer*, 54–99. One of the problems of Poulain's perspective lies in his definition of Christian mysticism, which he confines to inner prayer that makes people doubt the comprehensiveness of his list of the characteristics of Christian mysticism. Furthermore, some scholars, who argue for the importance of vocal petitionary prayer, may be concerned about Poulain's defining contemplation as the highest form of prayer. See Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 18. Bloesch indicates that many

mystical spirituality, provides the devotees with a glimpse into the complex world of mystical spirituality under the subject of mysticism.

Due to some different concerns between the mystics and Chinese evangelicals in particular contexts, Chinese evangelicals should develop their list of the characteristics of an authentic pursuit of the presence of God while holding to Chinese evangelical identity. The function of the list is for the devotees to screen the available resources before they jump into the world of spirituality, where mystical phenomena are attractive. Especially when the interfaith dialogue is thriving to persuade Christians to be receptive to spiritual practices of other religions and cults, some promote the unitive movement of religions through the spiritual/mystical platforms. Their advocacy may appear appealing if the devotees only look at the phenomena of some mystical experiences, which share some similarities among various religions and cults. However, if the ultimate source of these experiences is different, the nature and the goal of these experiences are different. Because of strong apologetic tendencies, Chinese evangelicals argue that Christ has no harmony with Belial, and a believer has no common with an unbeliever (2 Cor 6:15). Since the evangelical beginners, especially when they have no support and guidance from the churches, are easily attracted to appearance, they have an urgent need for instruction on the spiritual pursuit of life transformation to avoid the tendency of syncretism.<sup>108</sup>

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elements in mystical prayer are not biblical at all. Moreover, some characteristics, such as psychosomatic effects are not necessarily Christian. See Paper, *Mystic Experience*, 59, 64.

<sup>108</sup> The Chinese Evangelical Spirituality Research Center, which I propose in Appendix 2, could guide these evangelicals and their mentors as well.

## 6. Conclusion

When Chinese evangelicals have an encounter with mysticism, they would realize that their DNA resonates with Christian mysticism because a life radically centered on God “can find its way into the daily realities of family life, work, and political processes.”<sup>109</sup> Since each group staggers in its spiritual journey for various reasons, it purposefully tackles its issues by importing some features from Christian mysticism according to its needs and situations and redirects itself to be free from the restraint. Selectively appropriate mystical resources will enliven each group of Chinese evangelicals. They will intentionally avoid approaching God as an impersonal divine being but wait upon God’s touching on their lives. Instead of downplaying mystical experiences, they will relate to them with mature discretion. Practicing detaching from supernatural experiences, materials, and other created things, they will progressively be free to center in the Triune God, know him, and love him better. Moreover, instead of merely emphasizing intellectual or emotional aspects, they will realize and experience the intimate relationship with God involving the cultivation and participation of a whole being.

Each group may have a taste of mystical transformation; however, it is still far away from the goal of acquiring a full effect of union with God. This dissertation holds that inner regeneration demanded by evangelism is one of the core motivations for Chinese evangelicals to appropriate Christian mysticism. As Elaine Heath argues, evangelism is “the holistic initiation of people into the reign of God.”<sup>110</sup> She elaborates, “Evangelism as an initiatory process is complete only when individuals are fully incorporated into the church, participating in the life of the church in worship, service,

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<sup>109</sup> Cui, “Chinese Christianity DNA,” 8; Frohlich, “Mystics,” 529.

<sup>110</sup> Heath, *Mystic Way of Evangelism*, 13.

prayer, and evangelistic presence in the world.”<sup>111</sup> Along with the progress of the spiritual journey, devotees will experience the transformation of their perception and practices of evangelism. It reminds us that the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality aiming at the integration of a whole life of a holistic being and the most extended effect of union with God is a long way to go.

If each group only has its weakest points touched and urgent issues resolved, it would only acknowledge limited benefit from mysticism. If they know how other groups also benefit from mystical spirituality, they may inspire each other to appreciate and interact closely with different areas of Christian mysticism to advance their spiritual development. Even though appropriating mysticism is not the end but the means to the vision of the future Chinese evangelical spirituality, it is necessary to sharpen the tool to achieve the vision. Therefore, each group should work together for the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality, of which each group is an indispensable component. Hence, this dissertation turns to propose a vision and pathway for future spirituality, integrating the characteristics of various Chinese evangelical groups but not bounded by these group particularities. It will also include their shared vision—Jesus’ spirituality—and the core aspects of both doctrine and practices of the spiritual life.

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<sup>111</sup> Elaine, *Mystic Way of Evangelism*, 13.

## CHAPTER 5: THE FUTURE OF A CHINESE SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

Chinese spiritual theology is the area of theology that explores the work of the Holy Spirit among Chinese in every part of their life. If described from a Chinese evangelical perspective, it involves a life of preparation for, witness to, and response to the work of the Holy Spirit. It also manifests a dynamic continuity from history to the present, extending to the future.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a Chinese spiritual theology in the future can find its patterns in history and contemporary spirituality. It is inseparable from its historical keynotes and existing motifs. Most importantly, the spirituality of Jesus is its ultimate vision. This chapter sets to propose a pathway for Chinese spiritual theology with the inherent characteristics in view to progress to the ultimate vision. It includes the core aspects of doctrine, beliefs, and practices governing and guiding the life of the devotees. In the end, this chapter also provides a proposal for Chinese evangelicals to implement the pathway while holding to Chinese evangelical identity.

### **1. The Inherent Characteristics and the Ultimate Vision**

Vincent Lam summarizes seven characteristics of Chinese theology from 1900 to 1949.<sup>2</sup> Since Chinese theology in history was a lived theology that did not separate from spirituality, the exploration of characteristics of spiritual theology can find its parallel in the features of theology. Thus, it is beneficial to refer to Lam's synthesis of Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Lam, *Zhonghua Shenxue*, 468.

<sup>2</sup> Lam, *Zhonghua Shenxue*, 468–72.

theology for the exploration of spiritual theology. Therefore, along with a survey of the history of Chinese evangelicalism in chapter 1 and the description of contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality in chapter 3, I summarize the following seven characteristics of which the exploration of the future Chinese spiritual theology should be aware.

First, Chinese evangelicals are reluctant to receive denominational labels because they may lead to dissension. The indigenous movement from the beginning of the twentieth century has given birth to an intensive post-denominational sentiment among government-sanctioned churches and non-government-sanctioned churches, who realize that dissension hurts their development and evangelism.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the persecution against both churches brings them together in suffering for Christ and their faith.

Second, Chinese evangelicals uphold the Bible instead of denominational doctrines.<sup>4</sup> Many Chinese evangelicals claim that they follow the example of the apostolic churches in the Bible.<sup>5</sup> Many churches include reciting the Apostle's Creed in their ritual of Sunday worship, which they regard as their faith statement based on the Bible. Even though they acknowledge that their understanding of the Bible is limited, they agree that the right attitude is to keep pursuing the Truth and upholding the authority of the Bible.

Third, Chinese evangelicals value the pragmatic effectiveness of theology. Instead of logical and abstract theology, such as the nature of the divine persons in the theology of the Trinity, they tend to show more interest in how theology can contribute to the

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<sup>3</sup> The non-government-sanctioned churches criticized that the government-sanctioned churches compromised their faith because they allowed the CCP to control the churches through the TSPM.

<sup>4</sup> Menzies, "Pentecostals in China," 84.

<sup>5</sup> Chinese evangelicals realize that when they stress the denominational name "Reformed," they would be criticized and isolated from other churches.

regeneration and sanctification of human beings. They dwell less on the exploration of the natures of Christ than Christ's sacrificial model and the effect of the incarnation.

Fourth, Chinese evangelicals focus on the motifs of evangelism and mission. Some churches, such as *The Little Flock*, emphasize building up the church, whereas their purpose of building up the church is to empower members to do evangelism and mission. Furthermore, they pass on a spiritual life that focuses on evangelism and mission from generation to generation.

Fifth, Chinese evangelicals hold a serious apologetic attitude toward popular cults and other religions. From their experience of defending Christian beliefs, they become aware that non-believers and new converts are easy to regard religious practices as essentials to their faith. They observe that adopting the observances of popular cults and other religions may lead people to identify Christianity with these cults and religions, thus leading to syncretism. Therefore, they would resist the advocacy to embrace the spiritual practices of other religions, which has become popular in western spirituality.

Sixth, Chinese evangelicals hold various understandings toward the relationship with politics. Some oppose any involvement in politics. While some believe that they should stand up against the political actions that violate the right of religious belief. Still others advocate that they can disseminate a Christian perspective through political activities and exert the influence of Christianity on politics and the public. Generally, they guard against the impact of politics that may compromise biblical truth and faith. In the political context under the rule of the CCP, the resistance against the compromise of Christian faith and biblical truth because of political repression is a protracted struggle that characterizes Chinese evangelical identity.

Seventh, the theology of suffering is a constant motif of Chinese evangelicalism. Suffering amid the wars in history and persecution from the government and the public leads to a profound understanding that Chinese spiritual theology is not theoretic construction, but life and experience. Courage, forgiveness, perseverance, wisdom, peace, faith, love, hope, and other virtues propel the growth of the churches amid suffering.

Besides these seven characteristics, spiritual theologians should perceive every group of Chinese evangelicals as an indispensable part of the whole in Chinese evangelicalism. The differences between each group do not imply incompatibility. Instead, it indicates different expressions of Chinese evangelical spirituality in their particular immediate context at their current stage of development.

Claiming that they are not following any denominational models, Chinese evangelicals turn to Jesus, whom God reveals through the Bible, for the ultimate vision of their spirituality. Chinese evangelicals in different groups will manifest more similar characteristics in the future because all of them are pursuing after the spirituality of their Lord Jesus. Amazingly, Christian history has presented such a parallel pattern. When various spiritual traditions come together, they can perceive a comprehensive picture of Christian life, which has its origin in Jesus' life.

According to Richard Foster's research, at least six spiritual traditions, which have been secluded from each other for a long time in history, are flowing from the life of Jesus. The Holy Spirit works to bring these traditions together to manifest the divine paradigm of spirituality. Foster names these traditions (1) the Contemplative (prayer-filled), (2) the Holiness (virtuous), (3) the Charismatic (Spirit-empowered), (4) the Social Justice (compassionate), (5) the Evangelical (Word-centered), and (6) the Incarnational

(sacramental).<sup>6</sup> Each tradition has its gist that demonstrates its strength. It may fall into its potential perils if it goes to extremes or without the accompaniment of other streams. It will show the characteristics of other streams if devotees practice it fully and in a mature manner. Employing this typology, this dissertation will draw a portrait of Jesus' spirituality to be the ultimate vision for Chinese evangelical spirituality.

The gist of *the contemplative tradition* is the constant and loving gaze of the soul upon the loving God. Foster enlightens us that spiritual characteristics of this tradition, such as love, peace, delight, yearning, passion, and prudence, are the gift of God along with a deepening of the prayer life, without which we can neither love God nor enjoy him. Through all these spiritual characteristics, God gradually transforms the whole person into the likeness of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Contemplation helps to make God the center of attention. However, contemporary Chinese evangelicals should develop it amid their daily life, including social issues, so that they will not segregate themselves from ordinary life and communal life. Whereas, we understand the challenges for new believers to gaze upon God without the distraction from the world, their random thought, and their daily tasks and obligations. As Jesus often retreated from the crowd and prayed (Matt 14:23; Luke 6:12), we must follow Jesus into solitude so that we may develop unceasing prayer amid everyday life.

*The contemplative tradition* is part of the legacy from early Chinese evangelicals who were following the footsteps of Jesus. Among the contemporary Chinese evangelicals, many seniors in the government-sanctioned churches, house church evangelicals have inherited this trend. However, young evangelicals are weak in their

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<sup>6</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, xv–xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 49–51.

prayer life. Generally, compared to Christian mystical tradition, Chinese evangelicals need to deepen their contemplative life to enjoy an intimate relationship with God manifested in Jesus' life. Mystical tradition and its abundant resources and experiences of the contemplative life open the eyes and heart to perceive how profound the fellowship that God is willing to grant to his children. Among the figures whom I have included in chapter 2, Foster recommends mystics who contribute to the formation of Eastern Orthodox spirituality, John of the Cross, Brother Lawrence, and Madame Guyon for their rich instruction on deepening the prayer life.<sup>8</sup> They show the light for Chinese evangelicals to pursue the contemplation of Jesus on God the Father. Above all, John of the Cross advocates a necessity of gazing at the absent God for deepening spiritual growth, which provides a message of assurance on the union with God when they are seemingly separated from God. It will enliven the life of Chinese evangelicals who are suffering for/with Christ.

*The holiness tradition* emphasizes the formation of virtues to carry out the responsibility of preaching the gospel for the salvation of the world. It is not rules to keep one's life holy, nor work to earn salvation, but a loving unity with God, as Jesus obeyed God the Father's commands and remained in his love (John 15:10). It focuses on the transformation of inner life, which is the wellspring of outward actions. Genuine virtues will lead to work pleasing to God. However, I do not align myself with Foster when he equates the formation of character with the transformation into Christ-likeness because Christ-likeness can include areas of the life of Christ other than inner life or virtues.<sup>9</sup> For example, I hold that the devotees' Christ-likeness connotes their loving relationship with

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<sup>8</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 82–87, 89.

God demonstrated in a manner like how Jesus can see what God does, hear what God says, and obey what God wills (John 5:20, 30). The formation of a loving relationship may require the virtues of the devotees. As Thomas à Kempis says, the meek devotees receive the light of understanding from God.<sup>10</sup> However, God exercises his sovereignty to grant the devotees entrance into the divine realm that is beyond the material world so they can acquire what God wants them to do, to say, and to obey. Therefore, Christ-likeness is not exclusively human virtues but also a divine-human relationship because of the particular grace granted in Christ. Nevertheless, Foster is right with the reminder that virtues are the fruit of the gradual work of the Holy Spirit, which requests the devotees to participate through the means of grace.<sup>11</sup>

Influenced by the Holiness movement and the Keswick movement, Chinese non-charismatic evangelicals are close to *the holiness tradition*. Those evangelicals in government-sanctioned churches also pursue the formation of character. However, they tend to approach it from a self-making or Confucian perspective. Generally, Chinese evangelicals are weak in systematical education and the practice of asceticism or spiritual exercises. They have concerns about the potential perils of perceiving spiritual exercises as legalism or works-righteousness, which hinders them from strengthening their soul through spiritual practices. However, through Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of the Discipleship*, some of them may understand the necessity of spiritual disciplines for the formation of virtues, which enable them to take up the cross of discipleship.<sup>12</sup> Mystical spirituality is leading in the guidance of this area, especially Ignatius' spiritual exercises

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Imitation of Christ*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 88–91.

<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 115–16. Sichuan People's Publication translated and published *The Cost of Discipleship* in 2000, as one of the series of Religion and the World.

and Teresa's exhortation on prayer if Chinese evangelicals see it through the salvific lens of Jesus and his spiritual life. These mystical practices do not merely introduce more types of disciplines but enable devotees to deepen their spiritual experiences in God that affect life transformation.

*The charismatic tradition* is keen on following Jesus to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised (Luke 3:22; Matt 12:28; Mark 16:15–20; Acts 1:8). It makes the presence of the Holy Spirit transparent through the employment of the threefold function of the charisms of the Holy Spirit: leadership, ecstatic empowerment, and community-building.<sup>13</sup> The devotees, who focus on attaining the work of the Holy Spirit instead of relying on human effort, prepare themselves for the Holy Spirit to work among them, including making sure their community is in a loving unity instead of segregation. They continually experience the blissful work of the Holy Spirit that is beyond the comprehension of limited reason. However, if they do not exercise due caution, they are easily tangled by the superstitious, subjective, and supernatural phenomena, which are not authentic mystical work of the Holy Spirit.

Chinese evangelicals need the gift and power from the Holy Spirit to fulfill their mission in the world. On the one hand, many Chinese evangelicals have experienced the transformation of the inner life through the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the healing and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. However, they will face challenges if they are not spiritually mature. They can easily attach to supernatural experiences that may or may not come from God. On the other hand, many Chinese evangelicals in government-sanctioned churches tend to downplay the divine power because of the pressure from the government and liberal theology. Both groups of Chinese evangelicals can benefit from

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<sup>13</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 126.

mystical spirituality that provides an elaborate depiction of numinous encounters with the Holy Spirit while ultimately pursuing to be detached from these mystical experiences to acquire a purified and intimate relationship with God. They can shun the entanglement of mystical experiences through practicing detachment. The rich data and research on authentic numinous experience can encourage them to pursue the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit amid those who deny its existence.

*The social justice tradition* exercises the virtues, especially compassion, in particular social contexts that demand justice and love, including loving one's enemies. The arenas of practicing social justice include personal, social, and institutional dimensions.<sup>14</sup> The nurturing of virtues and the dealing of sins are inseparable from the outward actions to overcome evil with good in public. Furthermore, people can practice in their ordinary relationship with their family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbours that they can live in peace with all people. Social justice in the institutional arena does not have to do with the subversion of the rule of the particular political parties. Instead, it can be feeding the hungry, helping the helpless, reaching out to the marginalized, fostering healthy families and preventing domestic violence, and participating in environmental protection.

Chinese evangelicals actively participate in caring for people in need, including the orphans, the physically challenged, the seniors, the left-behind children, and the marginalized peasants in the cities. They also attend to numerous issues of conflict and manipulation in families, workplaces, churches, and public agencies. Moreover, they are facing challenges when they live with non-believing family members, neighbours, and colleagues. In particular, Chinese evangelicals from newly independent and open

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<sup>14</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 172–76.

churches endure enormous suffering when they peacefully strive to make their faith public, carry out the cultural mission, and struggle for more religious rights. Many mystics show a great example of following Jesus' footsteps to care (Matt 8:3; Mark 2:17, 8:2–3; Luke 4:18–19, 7:13). For instance, Johannes Tauler, well-known for his advocacy of leading a poor, perfect, contemplative life by following Jesus Christ, “work[s] as his Master worked before him, among the poor, the suffering, and the fallen.”<sup>15</sup> His life of unceasing labours of love demonstrates the driven force lying behind the caring effort is the rich spiritual attainment. The mystics leave a rich legacy that provides Chinese evangelicals with spiritual wisdom and strength to involve in various aspects of social justice.

Foster considers *the evangelical tradition* centered on God's Word, as Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God (Matt 4:17). This tradition affirms the primacy of the Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. He highlights the necessity of a faithful interpretation of the gospel in various cultural contexts among different groups.<sup>16</sup> The evangelicals are well-known in doctrinal fidelity that accompanies genuine spiritual experiences, including the transforming experience of conversion. Foster notes that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee to a faithful interpretation of the Bible, the Word of God written; meanwhile, the evangelicals also appeal to the apostles' evangelistic ministry for rightly interpreting the gospel and the commission of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the evangelicals are natural to demand a biblical interpretation of mystical experiences.

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<sup>15</sup> Winkworth, *John Tauler*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 219–23.

<sup>17</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 233.

Being Word-centered is not merely about the texts of the Bible, which Chinese evangelicals, especially the intellectuals, should keep in mind. The spiritual legacy of early Chinese evangelicals resonates with Christian mysticism that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is essential for understanding and owning the living Word. As A. W. Tozer notes, upholding the Bible is not only about Jesus but also about the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit inspires the Bible and illuminates the truth in the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

While the spiritual preparation of the devotees is a necessity for acquiring the spiritual experiences of illumination, a heart can make room for God only when it receives and allows the invasion of the Holy Spirit and forces the moral evil to withdraw.<sup>19</sup> Chinese evangelicals are quick in bringing people to decide to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour. Of course, the new birth in Christ through the Holy Spirit is the beginning of sanctification.<sup>20</sup> However, Chinese evangelicals are “slow” in making disciples of the new “converts.” Forcefully exhorting beginners to read and obey the Bible does not help them become mature disciples. Chinese evangelical leaders need to call them to pay attention to the work of the Holy Spirit for sanctification. Christian mysticism provides rich teaching on raising the awareness of God’s presence. However, the evangelicals realize that Christian mysticism is not prominent in systematic exposition of the Scripture, which may hinder Chinese evangelicals from following the teachings of the mystical traditions. Therefore, paying attention to the contemplative life and the Word-centered life of Augustine may help Chinese evangelicals to remove the hesitation to draw upon the mystical traditions. When Chinese evangelical leaders implement the pathway of the future Chinese spiritual theology, the reviews on the

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<sup>18</sup> Tozer, *Life*, 35–36.

<sup>19</sup> Tozer, *Holy Spirit*, January 7.

<sup>20</sup> Tozer, *Holy Spirit*, January 18.

literature and resources of mysticism from a biblical perspective will be beneficial for the progress of receiving mystical spirituality. In other words, Christian mysticism can play an essential role in the preparation of spiritual life to know God's Word. This enables Chinese evangelicals to claim that they are Word-centered, that is, they may become assertive to take up the responsibility of putting the Word in the center of their life because of the support from mystical tradition.

*The incarnational tradition* emphasizes the theological perspective that "God is manifest to us through material means," which is at the heart of the Jesus story (Phil 2:6–8).<sup>21</sup> Lord Jesus lived an ordinary life as a human being (Luke 2:40, 51–52), including following Jewish practices (Luke 4:16). The devotees can see the presence of God in the religious life, through liturgies, and in ordinary life, through living a life in the name of Jesus. God is willing to use the physical and material form as the platform for the devotees to experience him while they are living an earthly life. However, as Foster notes, humans may "fail to distinguish between a sacred object and the spiritual reality it signifies."<sup>22</sup> They may take God's grace for granted, for example, taking sacraments lightly or worshipping the creation as gods.

Mystical spirituality highlights a life beyond the physical dimension; however, it is not from a gnostic perspective, which either disdains or indulges the material. Some mystics note that life beyond the physical one is the foundation for the ability to live the authentic sacramental life that is the solution to the potential perils of idol worshipping when living by the incarnational tradition, which Foster does not mention in his book. For example, Ruusbroec perceives that after the experience of the highest union with God

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<sup>21</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 260.

<sup>22</sup> Foster, *Living Water*, 260.

through “imageless nudity,” devotees will live their ordinary life while maintaining continuous fellowship with God.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Richard of St. Victor has a systematic analysis of how the images help the reason to understand the invisible spiritual world based on the similitudes provided by the Scripture.<sup>24</sup> However, he also notes that ultimately the soul will acquire the divine understanding that moves beyond these images, even though it cannot progress without going through the previous grades with images.<sup>25</sup> Whereas, detachment from created materials does not have to occur at the highest union with God. The apophatic approach emphasizes a “beyond,” thus a “correction” to what devotees have acquired through the cataphatic approach. The mystics apply negation before they reach full union with God. Meanwhile, what is essential to the relationship between material and spirit is in Gregory of Nyssa’s perspective, the incarnation of Jesus removes the boundary between material and spirit, which is the ultimate foundation of living a sacramental life.<sup>26</sup> The stream of incarnation tradition, which Foster observes in Jesus’ spiritual life, if supplemented with mystical spirituality, provides a vision and guidance for Chinese evangelicals to live their faith in the church, in the family, in the workplace, and other public areas. The ability to live a daily life with God’s presence is essential for Chinese evangelicals to carry out their mission since they are not allowed to proclaim the gospel in places that the government does not approve. Their life has to utter a louder voice than their oral proclamation.

In a nutshell, the spirituality of Jesus as the wholistic work of the Holy Spirit will gather together the segregated Chinese evangelical groups when they work together to

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<sup>23</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 58–59.

<sup>24</sup> Palmén, *Imagination*, 259–62.

<sup>25</sup> Richard, *Twelve Patriarchs*, 161–62.

<sup>26</sup> Letham, “Three Cappadocians,” 194.

progress toward the Lord, whose life is in perfect union with the other two divine Persons. Even though different groups of Chinese evangelicals manifest their distinct characteristics because of their context and tradition, their commonality lies in honouring the Lord Jesus and their willingness to follow the paradigm of his spirituality. Therefore, the future Chinese evangelical spirituality will take Jesus' spirituality, or the six streams of living water, as the ultimate vision. Mystical spirituality has a role to play in empowering Chinese evangelicals to grow in each of these streams. Along the journey, the streams of spirituality that are shallow in each group will get deepened and widened by selectively entwining with mystical spirituality.

The following section will present the construction of a map of spiritual theology, which demonstrates the general characteristics of Chinese evangelical spirituality and reflects the correlational dialogue between contemporary Chinese evangelicalism and Christian mysticism toward the ultimate vision of spirituality. The core purpose is to open up the benefits of a more robust and discerning integration of mystical spirituality for the vitality and spiritual enlivening of the churches. It will cover one of the major concerns of Chinese evangelicals on how the Holy Spirit truly sanctifies them through the Scripture after they have been born again by faith in Christ.

## **2. The Nature of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Life Transformation**

### **The Holy Spirit as One Person in the Trinity**

The work of the Holy Spirit is an expression of his nature as one Person in the Trinity. Thus, life transformation is not self-conformation to an absolute ethical principle, which a non-person transcendent god endows humans to govern their conduct and their

relationship as Confucianism proclaims.<sup>27</sup> To understand life transformation rightly, Chinese evangelicals need a breakthrough by establishing a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit as one Person of the triune God. Union with God as a personal relationship with God can present a picture that is distinctive from Confucianism, other religions, and cults, which is following the Chinese evangelical motif of apologetics and evangelism.

Many Chinese evangelicals get to know the presence of the Holy Spirit through reading the Bible and their life experience instead of through learning theoretical doctrine of the Trinity or Pneumatology. They confess the core relationship among God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit through the following statement, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Chinese evangelicals believe that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who is leading them into the Truth.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, they have no difficulty accepting biblical passages that appear to be paradoxical. For example, Jesus is God’s Son who submits to the Father’s will, while he and the Father are One (John 10:30), that he is God (John 10:33) and Lord. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is from God the Father (John 15:26) and God the Son (Gal 4:6), and God is a Spirit. Moreover, God the Son was conceived through the Spirit. Chinese evangelicals accept these Bible passages related to the doctrine of Trinity but may not have a comprehensive understanding. However, they claim to understand these passages through the Holy Spirit, not merely counting on logical and rational analysis. Therefore, the claim that one can grasp the Truth solely

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<sup>27</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Many theologians begin to acknowledge the tendency to stress the role of reason in interpreting the Bible may be the product of the Enlightenment. While many theologians accept that a person is a holistic and integrative being, they become aware of the roles of current emotion or affection, experience, and future orientation playing in the formation of their perception.

through reason is a hindrance to understanding biblical teachings. Whereas, the assertion that Christians do not need rational thinking to grasp the Truth denies the reality that the Holy Spirit has his sovereignty to choose his way to guide his people into Truth, including reasoning, which is an essential function of a person.<sup>29</sup>

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in Life Transformation

The work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation is in accord with the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works on the foundation of the devotees' union with Christ toward the goal of the full effect of union with God. The union is neither merely the union with Christ nor solely the union with God the Father. It is union with the Triune God (John 17:21; 2 Cor 1:22). Furthermore, it is not merely the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christ, and God the Father in devotees, but also devotees living in the Holy Spirit, Christ, and God the Father (Jude 20; Eph 4:6; 1 John 2:28). Therefore, the Chinese spiritual theology should look to the Triune God for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation. The types of spirituality that claim to be solely Christ-centered, Spirit-centered, or Father-centered will hinder devotees from enjoying the full grace of God. As Simon Chan notes, "Trinitarian spirituality is not only modelled after the separate functions of the Father, Son and Spirit but also after the inner life of the Trinity itself."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Anti-intellectualism may be a response to the concern that the perceptions gain from the reason that exclusively close the door for the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Some work of the Holy Spirit may be trans-rational, thus conflicts with logical and rational thinking. Not promoting a religious intellectualism, Underhill notes that there is a place for the intellectual in the soul's approach to God, and merely annihilation of the intelligence cannot attain spiritual intuition. See Underhill, *Essentials*, 80–81.

<sup>30</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 49.

The Holy Spirit works to lead people to eternal life, one essential aspect of which is to know or have fellowship with God and his Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3; 1 John 1:3).<sup>31</sup> It is accomplished through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ in history and will be actualized fully in the eschatological era. However, God's will to save starts with the exercise of his sovereignty to choose Christians in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him (Eph 1:4).

Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation has both transcendent and immanent dimensions. Chan states that the traditional doctrine of immanence and transcendence bears three main implications for spiritual theology. First, God is relational regarding his relationship with the creatures; however, God is distinct from the created, which provides one of the essential guardians for the authentic evangelical spiritual theology.<sup>32</sup> The Holy Spirit guides and enables devotees to have an intimate relationship with God that both its nature and its effect can be called union with God. However, he will not turn the substance of devotees from that of the creature into that of the Creator. He provides an essential guide to evaluate whether the mystical concept of divinization or deification is orthodox.<sup>33</sup> He also distinguishes Christian life transformation from other religious claims about the merging of human beings into gods to become deities.

Second, God is free in his actions.<sup>34</sup> Even though the Bible describes some aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation as "putting on the life of Christ" (Gal

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<sup>31</sup> George Panikulam notes that the fellowship/communion with Jesus leads the way to the fellowship/communion with God the Father, who is the source of the eternal life of human beings. See Panikulam, *Koinōnia*, 133, 134, and 140.

<sup>32</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Bloesch notes that one of the foci of evangelical theology is the sanctification of believers rather than their divinization or deification. Whereas, it does not imply the exclusion of the terms like divinization and deification from Christian discourse. Instead, evangelicals should "preserve the unfathomable difference between the infinite God and finite humanity." See Bloesch, *Spirituality*, 42, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 43.

3:27; Col 3:12–17) and “denying oneself” (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20), how and when he works in a particular person is not predictable by human beings. Thus, public evidence is not able to manifest and evaluate fully the significance of the work of the Holy Spirit. The texts left by the spiritual/mystical theologians as evidence of witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit may not be the same as the real work of the Holy Spirit that has happened. Spiritual theologians explore the possibility of the work of the Holy Spirit but cannot claim to be masters of it. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that human effort, such as spiritual disciplines, can lead to a particular effect. Namely, one cannot manipulate the Holy Spirit by practicing any spiritual discipline.

Third, the “otherness” of God is essential for making a distinction between what is of God and what is not of God.<sup>35</sup> If we label everything as a work of God, we will arrive at a chaotic conclusion that sin and evil were from God. God, as the Creator, may intervene in the life of the devotees. Whereas the devotees and the spirits as the creatures also participate in the change of human life. The process of life transformation can be the mixed work of the Holy Spirit, human beings, and the spirits. However, this does not hinder devotees from desiring and committing to pursue the work of the Holy Spirit that implies a genuine encounter with God.

The work of the Holy Spirit may seem unpredictable and unknowing to devotees because of its transcendent dimension. However, the devotees can have faith in the Holy Spirit because Christ’s work in history assures the effect of the work of the Holy Spirit, which means that devotees can acquire the guaranteed outcome of salvation, such as sanctification and overcoming the devil in history. Sanctification in the contemporary world is progressively manifested through the witness of the devotees through their

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<sup>35</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 43–44.

pursuit of God. As Nee notes, his death with Jesus on the cross occurred in history, while his resurrection with Jesus is actualized in his daily life.

The immanent dimension of the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation includes materials. In the beginning, the Holy Spirit participated in creation. The fall of human beings had a deadly effect on not only the human spirits but also the physical world, which includes the physical body. God is determined to save the material realm (Rom 8:19–23). The Holy Spirit works, directly and indirectly, to bring transformation to creation. He heals the damaged physique and enlivens the dead bodies. He brings rivers to the desert (Isa 43:19). He exhorts and directs devotees to participate in bringing positive change to the creatures (Gen 1:28). Ultimately, he will transform the physical body into the spiritual body at the final resurrection and make all things new, including the creation of a New Heaven and a New Earth (Rev 21:1, 5). It is necessary to distinguish his miraculous work from the devotees' participation. Otherwise, people would interpret the illness cured by medication as God's miraculous work and understand the miracle of the five loaves and two fish as human beings sharing their food out of love for their neighbours. Such a distinction avoids the tendency to deny the existence of real miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit in the physical world of the devotees.

### **3. The Nature and the Life of Devotees**

#### **Devotees as Saved Sinners<sup>36</sup>**

The sin of Adam and Eve is imputed to devotees (Rom 5:12), which is the original sin from Augustine's perspective that can only be forgiven and atoned by the grace of God.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This dissertation employs "sin" and "virtue" when discusses from a general perspective, while "sins" and "virtues" implying individual behaviours and propensities.

Donald Capps notes, “The three most influential of [the metaphors for sin] in the history of the Christian faith see sin as rebellion, as missing the mark, and as isolation,” which implies aggressiveness, personal bondage, and estrangement, respectively.<sup>38</sup> These three dynamic metaphors connote the tendencies of repetition of sins instead of isolated acts, which demands devotees’ serious attention.

Devotees have been set free from the judgment of rebellion against God through faith in Christ’s atonement.<sup>39</sup> They have also been liberated from the power of sin through Christ’s death. Furthermore, through the cross, they are dead to the temptations of Satan, who works through their lust (James 1:14–15) to lead them to rebel against God. Evangelicals have concerns about the language of mysticism that may lead to the impression that the mystics believe in salvation through work, including spiritual practices such as contemplation. The evangelical doctrinal identity that upholds victory over sin solely through Christ is the stronghold against such a belief.

Redeemed by Christ, however, does not mean that devotees will no longer commit sins. As Evagrius shows, sins have the extensive left-over effect in the life of devotees that they cannot purify their life from sins without daily strife, especially when devotees are living in a sinful world among sinful people (Isa 6:5).<sup>40</sup> Evagrius develops a

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<sup>37</sup> Ernesto Bonaiuti summarizes that Augustine’s description of sin is “an infection which propagates itself from father to son through the act of generation.” See Bonaiuti, “Original Sin,” 163. Chinese liberals perceive sin as the selfishness that prevents an individual from caring about society. See Chow, *Theosis*, 117.

<sup>38</sup> Capps, *Deadly Sins*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> David Granfield, a professor at the Catholic University School of Law, says that “[m]ystical experience does not substitute for faith; instead, it is the phenomenon of enlightened faith perfected by charity.” Furthermore, he notes that “[t]heophanies occur on two major levels: the pre-mystical consciousness of God through reason and faith, and the more intense, mystical consciousness of God through the mediated experience of divine immediacy.” Therefore, faith is an indispensable element in the mystical experience of theophanies. See Granfield, *Heightened Consciousness*, 2–3.

<sup>40</sup> Evagrius’s writings on the Eight Evil Thoughts list four hundred and eighty-seven temptations that may stir up a person’s passions. Evagrius also quoted from scriptures for combating each temptation. See Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire Light of the Mind,” 508.

list of eight deadly thoughts to display the power of intellect in leading devotees to sins. He exhorts to avoid sins through interrogating these deadly thoughts and practicing other disciplines, thus, to acquire clear thinking to see the revelation of God's purpose as found in the Scripture and in creation.<sup>41</sup> Since then, theologians have developed traditional lists of deadly sins.<sup>42</sup>

With these representatives of the clusters of sins in mind, Capps develops his list of eight deadly sins to match Erik Erikson's eight stages in life.<sup>43</sup> Capps' purpose is to perceive the dynamic influence of sins in individual development and cure these sins with eight saving virtues listed in Erikson's developmental stages. Capps tries to argue that God has given everyone the innate virtues to combat sins.<sup>44</sup> As Philip Sheldrake notes, it is the traditional concepts of the spiritual journey appropriated to the realm of social science.<sup>45</sup> Whereas, Capps is not satisfied with approaching this subject from the human developmental perspective. He relates Erikson's virtue therapy to Jesus' Beatitudes, through which he argues that faith is the actual empowerment of virtues that God has granted to human beings to combat sins.<sup>46</sup> Virtues are God's grace to human beings when he creates them. However, they can only fully nurture virtues and exert their full effect when they return to God. Most importantly, perceiving virtues as a Christian way of life

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<sup>41</sup> Stewart, "Evagrius," 269–70.

<sup>42</sup> Capps, *Deadly Sins*, 12–13. *Pilgrim's Progress* written by Bunyan emphasizes a lifelong battle against iniquity and pursuit of sanctification until the end of this life when believers actualize eternal salvation. See Coolman, "Spiritual Itineraries," 304. "Progress" does not obviously refer to an increase in virtues or a decrease of sins.

<sup>43</sup> Capps, *Deadly Sins*, 22–23. Capps' list of deadly sins is gluttony, anger, greed, envy, pride, lust, apathy, and melancholy.

<sup>44</sup> Capps, *Deadly Sins*, 19, 123. Erikson's list of virtues is hope, will (and courage), purpose (and dedication), competence (and discipline), fidelity, love, care, and wisdom.

<sup>45</sup> Sheldrake, "Spiritual Journey," 389.

<sup>46</sup> Capps, *Deadly Sins*, 120, 122.

that connotes the work of the Holy Spirit, Capps' construction provides significant pastoral and spiritual counsel for the spiritual progress of devotees.<sup>47</sup>

Hence, devotees experience not merely the forgiveness of sin and liberation from sin but also the renewal by putting on divine virtues. As the Bible says, devotees are “renewed in the spirit of [the] mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:23–24 NASB). Life transformation is not merely getting rid of sins but also forming godly virtues. As evangelicals call godly virtues the fruit of the Holy Spirit, nurturing godly virtues is not the fruit of human effort but the work of the Holy Spirit. The primary godly virtue is knowingly “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30 NASB). The second is loving others as oneself with the source of strength and wisdom from the loving God. Therefore, godly virtues are relationally oriented. Phil Zylla argues that virtue as consent to being from the perspective of suffering is “agree” with the compassionate God, thus trains the pastors to “listen to the sufferings of others...and the gentle movements of the breeze of God’s Spirit.”<sup>48</sup> By holding compassion at the core of virtue, a new horizon emerges for devotees to perceive God’s work in the suffering world, encouraging those who suffer together with them, serving those who are suffering, and embracing those who cause their suffering.

Godly virtues manifest the divine grace to devotees. They are neither characters nurtured by school education in China nor core socialist values, even though some godly virtues and socialist values may have a similar manifestation. Demonstrating the nature

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<sup>47</sup> Capps, *Deadly Sins*, 119–36.

<sup>48</sup> Zylla, *Virtue as Consent to Being*, 114.

of the Triune God and the reality of humans' union with God, godly virtues are human-divine oriented instead of social-cultural oriented. The work of the Holy Spirit enables devotees to discern socialist values from godly virtues and conform to godly virtues instead of holding on to socialist values. A profound relationship with God experienced in the mystical tradition would open their eyes to apply mystical practices to nurture their spirituality, pursuing to experience such a delicate yet vigorous transformation.

Moreover, physical bodies are another area of salvation and sanctification. The evangelical attitude towards the body is paradoxical. On the one hand, salvation includes taking care of, healing, and ultimately the resurrection of the body.<sup>49</sup> Chinese evangelicals frequently experience miraculous healing of the body. They watch for some aspects of ascetic life advocated in the mystical spirituality that may go against the notion of necessity to take care of the body. On the other hand, devotees offer their bodies to God. Charitable activities may require them to lead an ascetic life, including sacrificing their bodies to love others. Devotees should not compromise their devotion to the service of God, which may be caused by their intention of taking care of their bodies. Furthermore, as some mystics indicate, God uses the suffering of the body to fulfill his will, as he used the thorn in Paul to make him humble amid the extraordinary grace he granted to Paul.

The Holy Spirit guides devotees to know when to care for their bodies and when to sacrifice. John Song, a famous evangelist, died at the age of forty-three. Many people commented that his health suffered because he was exhausted in his evangelistic movements. However, according to Song, God foretold him that he only had fifteen years

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<sup>49</sup> Liu, *Song Shangjie*, chapter 51. Eastern Orthodox believes that the source of sin is death. Hence, the final solace is in life after mortal life. See Chow, *Theosis*, 137.

for service, so he worked hard to make the best of those fifteen years.<sup>50</sup> Song believed in God's sovereignty over his life that he sacrificed his body to the extreme of loving God and others.

Finally, devotees as persons are the subject of research within the discipline of social science, such as psychology and anthropology. However, the principles of social science that work for non-believers may not work for devotees if the researchers do not consider the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, those devotees who are researchers in the field of social science should faithfully witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in their research, applying the spiritual gift of discernment (1 Cor 2:14).<sup>51</sup>

### The Life of Devotees

Devotees are the subject and participants of the work of the Holy Spirit. The venue for the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation is the life of devotees, including their personal life, life in their faith community, and life in public. To be faithful to their roles as witnesses, devotees should sharpen their consciousness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Mystical spirituality provides abundant resources on the practice to nurture heightened consciousness that opens them up to the loving union with God, which brings about life transformation.

Union of devotees with God manifests the lordship of God. Since authentic disciples of God seek the goal of their life to transition from who they are now to who

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<sup>50</sup> Liu, *Song Shangjie*, chapter 51.

<sup>51</sup> This chapter mentions this dimension since it is important to the integrated work of spiritual theology and other academic disciplines. However, this dissertation cannot fully develop it because it is beyond the scope of this research.

they will be, Zylla notes, the *telo* of devotees is full union with God.<sup>52</sup> Thus, devotees, including their will, affection, mind, and action, are continuously conformed to the will of God. They will not stop their pursuit until they achieve the goal. From this perspective, the life of those devotees who acquire full union with God is a genuine and full witness to the lordship of God over every facet of human life.

Therefore, the life of devotees who have turned away from rebellion against God to confessing God as their Lord is a progressive journey of union with God to reach the goal of full union with God, which they may or may not achieve in their lifetime on earth.<sup>53</sup> Chan notes that different theologians have various perspectives on how the Christian life can be characterized as it progresses.<sup>54</sup> He summarizes that P. T. Forsyth perceives the progress as the growth of faith, and generally, many Christians identify it with some ethical concepts such as maturity or Christ-likeness, or the love for God solely that is acquired only in full union with God. Chan also opines that both the mystics and the Puritan ascetics uphold the perfection of love for God, along with loving others.<sup>55</sup> However, the work of the Holy Spirit does not limit to faith and Christ-likeness.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Zylla, "Culture and Hermeneutics," 74.

<sup>53</sup> Many Protestants stress the growth of spirituality in a general term. However, they do not mention any specific stages or patterns along with the progress. A core concern is that one is impossible to reach "perfection" or "glorification" in the spatial-temporal dimension. As Paul says, there is a time of full understanding or knowing when we meet Christ face to face (1 Cor 13:12). Many understand this face-to-face encounter as an encounter in eternity. We may acknowledge the gap between the human-divine engagement in the spatial-temporal dimension and that in eternity. However, union with God is a gift from God. It is up to God whether he grants it to anyone. Therefore, if God commands devotees to pursue perfection and union with God, devotees should follow God's command. What the experience of full union with God would be like is a subject of continuous study for spiritual theologians on these experiences, which is a witness to God's work and grace to those who follow his words. See Flew, *Idea of Perfection*, 397.

<sup>54</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 97.

<sup>55</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 97–101. Chan says, "[m]ystical union, or whatever we choose to call it, is but the proper end of a life of fellowship with God that begins at justification."

<sup>56</sup> April DeConick presents the conflict between faith mysticism in the Johannine community and vision mysticism in the early Syrian Christian community. DeConick's study indicates the existence of both traditions in Christian communities. She argues that the canonization of the Gospel of John instead of the Gospel of Thomas has silenced the voice of the early Syrian vision mysticism. She analyzes that John

Furthermore, union with God, manifesting the relationship between devotees and God, reflects the divine plan that lasts from before the creation to the New Heaven and the New Earth and includes the individuals and the communal people of God.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, scholars should not confine the study of the mystical progress to the individual devotees' progress but should put it in context and include the growth of a faith community as well, even the development of the Church.<sup>58</sup>

Based on the reality that Chinese evangelicals highly uphold the authority of the Bible, this dissertation proposes that the progress of the devotees' union with God can manifest in the transformation of their knowing the Truth/the Bible, both individually and corporately. I agree that the four stages of the spiritual journey—awakening (rebirth), purification, illumination, and union—are helpful for devotees to examine their progress. I hold that how well devotees know the Truth can be an essential element of signaling in which stages devotees may live.

Knowing the Truth refers to not merely an intellectual understanding of the Bible but a living relationship between devotees and the Triune God. It does not go beyond what God has revealed in the Bible. However, it transcends what Chinese evangelicals

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exhorts Christians, most of whom may not experience entering into heaven through visions to put faith in Jesus, without relying on “seeing” and “sensing.” DeConick, *Voices*, 135, 162–63.

<sup>57</sup> Both Calvin and Augustine stress the role of the Holy Spirit in corporate union with God. See Schwanda, *Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism*, 40.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the progressive or stage concept of union with God for the individual devotees proposed by mystical theology cannot meet the needs of a Chinese spiritual theology for the development of corporate spirituality. However, the core characteristics of different stages can play the role of parameters in describing the status of communal spirituality. Chinese evangelicals can develop on Augustine's ecclesial mystical spirituality for the needs of communal spirituality. Patout Burns summarizes, “Augustine identified three types of ‘mystical’ experience in which the congregation could identify the divine presence and discern the nature of the heavenly goal to which it was called: the joy of understanding scripture intimated heavenly knowledge of God; the services of praise and worship reflected the heavenly liturgy; and, finally, the people's desire for God anticipated its satisfaction.” See Burns, “Ecclesial Mysticism,” 203. Furthermore, the community of the Beguines also demonstrates corporate characteristics such as group support, guidance, and service in pursuing a union with God amid abundant mystical experiences.

understand of the Bible. Furthermore, when the Holy Spirit leads devotees into the Truth, he also enables them to put the biblical truth into practice and experience the Truth. Most importantly, the progress demonstrated in knowing the Truth takes place in the concrete situations that are full of suffering, as Jesus says that the world will persecute devotees as they have persecuted Jesus, the master of the devotees (John 15:20).

A series of three practices, which I design for regular group retreats, can explain such progress to some degree. Group setting is an intentional design since individuals' spiritual progress and journey cannot be separated from their community. They are seeking God's truth corporately.<sup>59</sup> These practices integrate scriptural understanding and the transformational encounter of the soul with God, which Kevin Hughes perceives that have been gradually separated since late Middle Ages.<sup>60</sup>

The first practice mainly focuses on discernment. Practitioners finish the first practice before they gather as a group. They bring what they encounter in every area of their life, including their thoughts, decisions to make, and social phenomena, to discernment, according to the biblical teachings. The process of discerning includes prayer, exegesis of the related biblical texts, a study of the biblical theology and doctrines, and seeking advice from the community. After the discernment, they draw a conclusion from the biblical truth regarding the issues that they want to examine. Then they decide to adopt the attitude and act according to the conclusion. When they gather as a group, they share the process and result of discernment with the community. Even though God's grace and devotees' godly attitude and affection play a role in the first practice, it primarily involves an exercise of the intellectual faculty.

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<sup>59</sup> Coolman, "Spiritual Itineraries," 304–5.

<sup>60</sup> Hughes, "Living the Word," 110.

The second practice is a practice of mind in the heart. It intentionally brings devotees forward to read the biblical texts from involving the mind to engaging the whole person. I call it “内心圣地[*neixinshengdi*, the holy land in the heart.” It is a practice similar to *The Jesus Prayer*. I replace the content of *The Jesus Prayer* with the biblical texts or the biblical truth attained from the first practice. Following the rhythm of breathing, practitioners try to move the words of the biblical texts from the brain area to the heart area, if possible, extending to the whole body. This practice requires a high level of concentration and trains the ability of attentiveness as well. Its purpose is to keep the biblical truth not merely in mind but also in the heart, which represents the whole person. Its expected effect is to expand the lordship of Jesus over the devotees, so-called extending the holy land of God in the devotees.

A third practice is to experience hearing the speaking of the Holy Spirit and enjoy a contemplative gazing upon God. It is a practice of *Lectio Divina*, four readings of a biblical pericope, mostly chosen from the four gospels. These four readings represent an increasing level of the intimate experience of God: getting familiar with the literal texts, the whole person immersed in the texts, seeking God speaking through the texts, and holding on to the transformation acquired through the divine experience and enjoying the loving presence of God. Afterward, they share what God speaks to them and the effect of the experience with the community. They bring these experiences to examination through the first practice and acknowledge that these experiences may challenge the conclusion of the first practice.

Acquiring the authentic speaking of the Holy Spirit would transform the practitioners and enable them to apply or carry out the biblical truth. Meanwhile, to

prepare for the acquirement of a contemplative experience in knowing the Bible, devotees need to pursue spiritual growth and a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. These practices allow devotees to experience the traditional ‘fourfold sense’ of scriptural reading and open them up to allow the biblical truth to transform their life.<sup>61</sup> The process involves both the pursuit of the devotees and a direct encounter with God that transforms and enhances the pursuit. Hence, the experiences in this series of three practices manifest spiral growth in knowing the Bible.

The progress shown in knowing the Truth includes at least three aspects. The first one is an increase in intellectual understanding of the Bible. Devotees gradually commit to reading, memorizing, studying, and interpreting biblical texts, the purpose of which is not to gain information but to conform their life to biblical teachings. It is similar to spiritual reading but emphasizes the necessity of the exercise of intellect and reasoning.<sup>62</sup> The second aspect refers to growing obedience to biblical teachings. Devotees become more determined to put into practice what they understand of the Bible. The third one is that the authentic experience of hearing the Holy Spirit revealing the meaning of the Bible becomes more abundant, which is similar to Watchman Nee’s experience of illumination. I echo Foster’s notion that a direct experience with the Holy Spirit, such as divine voice, visions and prophecies, and conveys of divine messages, is the application of the Bible in particular contexts; thus, it would not conflict with biblical teachings.<sup>63</sup> Such an experience contributes tremendously to the progress in the first and second aspects. A direct encounter with the Holy Spirit transforms one’s intellectual

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<sup>61</sup> Hughes, “Living the Word,” 114, 125–26.

<sup>62</sup> Chan dedicates a chapter to introduce spiritual reading and its methods. See Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 158–71.

<sup>63</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 247–48.

understanding and the ability to obey God. Devotees need all three facets during the spiritual journey, from union with God (rebirth), through purification and illumination, into full communion with God. Receiving more and more messages from the Holy Spirit may indicate that the devotees enter into the stage of illumination, while the abundance of contemplative experience coming from the direct messages from God is also a sign of advanced progress. These experiences may occur in devotees' daily life, including when they exercise the first practice. However, full communion with God will not actualize until devotees live a life with complete obedience to God's Word.

The progress, which I propose, is different from Origen's three levels of understanding of the Scripture. Origen's interpretation of the Scripture implies that a biblical text contains three levels of meaning: the literal reading, the anagogical reading (eschatological meanings), and the allegorical reading (divine mysteries). Devotees need to progress in spirituality to acquire the equivalent ability for higher levels of reading. In my proposal, the meaning of a biblical text acquired from intellectual exegesis may be similar to that given by the Holy Spirit delivered in a direct experience. Since the latter accompanied by a mystical experience, it transforms and enhances the devotees' faculties, including intellect, affection, will, and action, to know this biblical teaching.

The above presentation of these three practices does not aim at a comprehensive analysis and argument for this design. This set of practices is just a miniature of devotees' pursuit of God. It only manifests an application of the future Chinese spiritual theology. Besides, I employ it as an illustration to demonstrate a model of spiritual progress. The following section elaborates on the perceptions of devotees' life from a more general and broader perspective.

Chinese Spiritual theology, which is a study on the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation, first, reflects Chinese evangelicals' obedient response to the truth that the Holy Spirit is working. Sometimes when God acts alone, devotees have no participation in God's work (Rom 9:11). Nevertheless, God clearly requests devotees to participate in some areas. One essential command that devotees should obey is to be watchful and pray (Matt 24:42, 25:13, 26:40; Mark 13:34; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2; 1 Pet 4:7). The purpose of being vigilant and prayerful includes avoiding falling into temptation, waiting for the second coming of Jesus, and mostly, for encountering God or the work of the Holy Spirit. Chan notes that watchful prayer is the right attitude to make an appropriate response to the mystery of God's providence.<sup>64</sup> When devotees start diligently practicing watchful prayer and waiting for the work of the Holy Spirit, they find themselves struggling with their sins and the temptation from Satan and the world. Therefore, they intentionally guard themselves against sins. Before their conversion, they have no power from the gospel to do so. Since they are set free from sin through Christ's salvation, they keep themselves away from sins when they become prayerful. For some mystics, these experiences of devotees appear to be the purification of sins or purgatory at the beginning stages of the spiritual journey.<sup>65</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean the Holy Spirit expects devotees to strive to purify themselves from sins even before he is more involved in the life of devotees by granting them more experience of illumination, because purification is the effect of the liberating power of the gospel when devotees begin to be watchful and prayerful.

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<sup>64</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 213.

<sup>65</sup> Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 174–75. Mulholland describes several stages inside the stage of purgation, of which a revolutionary orientation of the “trust structures” from self-relying to trusting in God is a signal of mature faith. See Mulholland, *Journey*, 85.

Therefore, even for those devotees who feel they do not experience much illumination of the Holy Spirit, being prayerful is essential as their response to God's Word, through which they will enjoy one of the effects of the power of salvation in their life. Prayer is also crucial when devotees exercise the intellectual scriptural understanding, which helps them to discover sins and obey biblical teachings. As they increasingly resist sins, they will turn more towards God, which indicates the improvement of their relationship/fellowship with God. As Jesus promised, those who obey God will know the Truth (John 8:31–32). Knowing more truth of God, in turn, helps devotees learn how to be watchful and prayerful. Thus, it creates a virtuous cycle in the life of devotees.

Hence, prayer life and reading the Bible are essential for progress in the spiritual journey. As the goal is *full* union with God, only unceasing prayer and meditation on God's Word day and night can match the goal.

Devotees may experience the abundant work of the Holy Spirit amid unceasing prayer.<sup>66</sup> Yet, it requires efforts for believers to attain unceasing prayer. Many evangelical leaders advise beginners to start prayer life realistically, such as starting their devotional life with a five-minute prayer. The mystics may be surprised to hear such advice because the believers are trying to attain unceasing prayer. As unbelievable as it may be, it is the reality of the life of many Christians. It realistically discloses the challenges laying ahead of devotees, not only for themselves individually but also for their fellow pilgrims communally.

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<sup>66</sup> As Paul says, "the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8: 26–27 NASB). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit also works to prompt devotees to pray. See Egan, *Future of a Tradition*, 127.

Most Chinese evangelicals practice prayers as praising God, giving thanksgiving to God, confession of sins before God, and petition. Petition to God regarding particular requests is a chief practice in the life of devotees. It is an expression of relying on God and putting faith in God's care. Petitionary prayers are also an opportunity for devotees to examine their own needs and desires through God's Word and God's response to their requests to discern whether these requests are pleasing to him.

The breakthrough in prayer life lies when the devotees realize that unceasing attentive consciousness of the presence of God is a way of prayer. As vocal communication between two lovers can improve their relationship, the intentional awareness of the presence of the lovers also develops their mutual relationship. The practice of recollection contributes to the acquirement of habitual consciousness of the presence of God. The experiences of the mystics, including those in Eastern Orthodox, present the probability of the biblical teaching on continuous prayer (1 Thess 5:17).<sup>67</sup> The practice of these prayer disciplines are workable but may face different challenges in light of particular contexts. Although demanding, facing these challenges and resolving the difficulties are part of the life of a spiritual journey.

Reading the Bible is an action of devotees who actively pursue the loving knowledge of God revealed through the Bible. The Bible is God's Word presented in the form of text. The study of human beings shows that there is no objective reading of a manuscript. However, it does not stop devotees and other readers from approaching the biblical texts as a form of writing. In the history of Christianity, scholars have developed

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<sup>67</sup> Vladimir Lossky's *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* has been translated into Chinese and published in Hong Kong in 2018. It presents to Chinese people the mystical union that can be traced back to the Scripture, the patristic lived theology, and the work of God, through the Son and the Holy Spirit in the ecclesial context. See Lossky, *Eastern Church*, 11, 15–20.

many hermeneutic methods, expecting to understand the truth revealed in the Bible for the growth of devotees. These hermeneutic approaches have created tension in themselves. Devotees also feel the tension among various meanings of one text.<sup>68</sup> However, many evangelicals stay intact by upholding the ultimate authority of the Bible and biblical inerrancy amid tensions. Practically, they agree on some core doctrinal statements as the basis of ecumenical cooperation in some ministries.

The Bible, as God's Word, lies in its living characteristics, which indicates that it is not obsolete at any time. God continues to speak personally to devotees, individually or communally, through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Truth. He communicates to guide devotees into the Truth, not only in the dimension of intellectual knowledge but also through the providence of character for knowing God. Since Jesus is the Truth, the speaking of the Holy Spirit is in accordance with God the Son. The Holy Spirit does not contradict what the Word of God or Jesus has already revealed. Even though industrious exegesis of the Bible with various hermeneutic approaches is not equivalent to God speaking to humanity, it is a preparation for receiving the speaking of the Holy Spirit. In practice, the detachment from favouritism on particular approaches or exegetical meanings of the biblical passages is helpful for devotees to discern the speaking of the Holy Spirit. Detachment does not mean "neglect" or "forsaking" but "without being controlled by" the subjects.<sup>69</sup>

According to the stage perception in mystical theology, following devotees purifying their sins, they would enter the stage of illumination, when they experience

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<sup>68</sup> Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 264–72.

<sup>69</sup> According to O'Donoghue's perspective, the painful struggle of detachment from the world does not lie in "great possessions in the form of material goods, but rather of the affections that chain down the heart, and only reveal their strength when we try to break them." See O'Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 66.

fruitful work of the Holy Spirit. Mulholland notes that the stage of illumination starts with a constant consciousness of the presence of the loving God within devotees through unceasing prayer and increasing social concern through actively loving others, which demonstrates obedience to God's Word. The profound awareness of God within renews devotees' relationship with the world outside through the empowerment of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, so devotees would not forsake the world and withdraw to an isolated life.<sup>70</sup> Since the illumination of the Holy Spirit brings devotees into the Truth, the consciousness of the presence of God is not merely a sense of his presence but refers to being conscious of the Holy Spirit speaking and actively responding to the spoken Truth.

When the life of devotees manifests noticeable characteristics of the stage of illumination, they also encounter more challenges on the temptations from Satan and the world, as they are increasingly sensitive to the spiritual battles and the needs and the sins of the world.<sup>71</sup> They become more and more sophisticated in the practice of discernment. The Holy Spirit enables them to move further along in their spiritual journey amid the challenges if they respond actively to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The life of full union with God, which is characterized by full obedience to God's Word, is the outcome of the intensive work of the Holy Spirit, which brings devotees both joyful luminous consolation and lonely dark desolation.<sup>72</sup> The Holy Spirit is continuously leading devotees beyond what they have known into the unknown truth of God.<sup>73</sup> The unknown truth of God does not refer to the truth that contradicts the Bible or

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<sup>70</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 81, 95–97.

<sup>71</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> Mulholland, *Journey*, 98–99.

<sup>73</sup> In Irenaeus's words, it was the process toward perfection and to receive and bear God. See Finch, "Irenaeus," 100. Knowing the Truth is not merely an intellectual exercise but to "see" and to live in a space created by the advent of a new horizon fully occupied by God as the center. See Kristo, "Interpretation of Religious Experience," 29.

Jesus. Instead, it is precisely the truth in the Bible or Jesus that devotees have not known yet (Luke 2:50; John 13:7). Furthermore, as devotees experience more and more detached from the created world, their known truth of the Creator is transformed. Therefore, the unknown truth may not be entirely new to them.

Whatever the experience, known or unknown, devotees are learning to rest in God. Devotees appear to be quiet, even their prayer to God seeming to be quiet.<sup>74</sup> While they rest in God, the persecution inflicted by the world does not hinder their sacrificial love toward those who persecute them, as Jesus manifested the love of God toward those who crucified him and interceded for their forgiveness of sin.

Therefore, the life of devotees in the world is an integrative part of their personal life. In the same way, knowing the truth of God integrates knowing God, knowing oneself, knowing fellow devotees, and knowing the world with love. The divine love does not blind devotees' spiritual eyes to know the world. Devotees do not "know" all aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the Holy Spirit transforms the "knowing" of the devotees, including methodologies, according to the Truth. Therefore, devotees neither totally reject the disciplines of social or natural science nor blindly accept them but actively contribute to the development of these disciplines through the work of the Holy Spirit, which also plays a role in life transformation. Participation in the improvement of social or natural science through the work of the Holy Spirit is one part of the fulfillment in the cultural mission for some Chinese evangelicals.

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<sup>74</sup> If the prayer of quietism is just a demonstration of the life of devotees as they rest in God, it may not be appropriate for those who have not acquired the disposition of rest. Devotees' rest before God does not implicate that they will not make a radical move to love God and love others as Jesus' extreme sacrifice for sinners that he chose the cruellest death to make atonement for them.

The devotees do not live out their love for the world individually. They present to the world not as individuals but as a group of God's people witnessing the presence of God. The truth of God shows that individual devotees are never one body of Christ but one member of the body of Christ. When the devotees perceive themselves from the perspective of the Holy Spirit, they would admit that they could not accomplish their role in witnessing for God through life transformation unless they obey the lordship of the Holy Spirit to find their places in the community of God's people. Discerning God's will for their role and submitting to God's will are the spiritual disciplines in communal life. Based on this foundation, the devotees participate in worship, prayer, various ministries of service, and mission. Thus, evangelical life also manifests the transformation of Chinese communal culture according to the Truth.

Therefore, devotees, individually and communally, witness the presence of God, proclaiming to the world both God's love and God's justice. For the lost people of God, their returning to God is accepting God's mercy. For others, their rejecting of God is receiving God's judgement. However, for whatever group of people, the devotees, as witnesses of God's presence, are serving the world according to God's will.

The Holy Spirit assigns the individual devotees to focus on serving in different scopes of the world, which may be their family, workplace, social community, and mission field (national or abroad), to fulfill their responsibility of witnessing. Whatever it may be, the individual devotees work with their fellow members, within/without their faith community. Similarly, the Holy Spirit works within/without the faith community in the life transformation of the devotees through/for their union with God.

Faithful to the role of witness, Chinese evangelicals are experiencing suffering, which is a major theme of their spirituality.<sup>75</sup> They are living in a nation, whose political governance forcefully demands patriotism, supporting the CCP, and social stability. In this particular context, the Holy Spirit works through the suffering of devotees in life transformation for full union with God.<sup>76</sup> Some mystics regard suffering as a means to share in the suffering of Christ. Thus, they identify with Christ by imitating his Passion.<sup>77</sup> Different from the medieval mystics, most Chinese evangelicals do not go to the extreme of voluntarily inflicting physical pain. They practice fast and vigil, which allows them to spend more time with God, pay attention to God, and have faith in God. By identifying with Christ in suffering, they intensively seek “God’s own expressed intentions in the world” revealed in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>78</sup> The presence of suffering because of obeying God does not imply that God is weak and that he cannot eradicate persecution. Neither does it deprive Chinese evangelicals of the right to resist maltreatment. By identifying with Christ, the incarnated God, they, in their bodies, are led forward by the Holy Spirit on a journey to full union with God.

Suffering for/with Christ builds up a spiritual community of Christ beyond the boundary of the churches. Those devotees who suffer because of persecution do not suffer alone. Because the physical, material, psychological, and personal protection and support cannot satisfy the devotees who suffer, both the afflicted devotees and the

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<sup>75</sup> It is in the intimate relationship that devotees understand God’s suffering for us because of his love that they desire and will to suffer for God. See Astell and Cavadini, “Song of Songs,” 34.

<sup>76</sup> Esther Cohen notes that involuntary suffering could be perceived either as divine favour or as punishment. See Cohen, *Pain in Late Medieval Culture*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Butcher, “Suffering Mystic,” 174. Butcher notes that suffering is not for physical or spiritual self-alienation but provides “a practical path to complete consciousness of one’s being—a place where subject and object unite,” thus the mystics attempt to unite with their Creator through identifying with Christ, “the embodiment of humanity and divinity.”

<sup>78</sup> Zylla, *Roots of Sorrow*, 8.

supporters always rest in God and experience communion with God and with each other through prayer in the Holy Spirit.<sup>79</sup> The love and faith acquired from the fellowship sustains the hope for the continuous salvific work in/for the world.

Chinese evangelicals experience the severity of sins and the intensive struggle against temptation and persecution for fulfilling their mission and confessing the full lordship of God in every area of their life. In light of mystical spirituality, they would set full union with the Triune God as the goal of the spiritual life, thus extending their understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, the devotees, neighbours, and the world from the perspective beyond the temporal-spatial limitation. Chinese evangelical spirituality in the future would acknowledge the value of the devotees' effort but stress the necessity of distinguishing it from the work of the Holy Spirit that transforms the labour of the devotees to know and love the Truth better.

#### **4. Proposal for Making the Change**

The above sections have presented a pathway to a Chinese theology (evangelical) of spirituality in the future in light of the enlightenment from mystical traditions. The presentation is from the integrative perspective that regards various groups of Chinese evangelicals as a whole. However, contemporary Chinese evangelicals are living in a particular context, bearing their specific spiritual status. Therefore, a practical proposal for Chinese evangelicals to start the journey of implementing the pathway of spirituality should consider both general and particular characteristics.

Chinese evangelicals are dialectic in holding onto Chinese traditions and opening up to foreign influence.<sup>80</sup> Chinese evangelicals have two core identities to retain

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<sup>79</sup> Zylla, *Roots of Sorrow*, 126–30.

consciously and unconsciously. One is Chinese. The other is evangelicalism. Chinese evangelicals hold evangelicalism as their primary identity. They are seeking to transform the manifestation of their Chinese identity for evangelicalism. A detailed analysis of various views on the transformation of Chinese identity is impossible in this dissertation. Therefore, this section will have a simple discussion on how Chinese evangelicals demonstrate and transform the following three core motifs in Chinese identity.

As Chinese, Chinese evangelicals value 合一 (*heyi*, unitary wholeness), 和平稳定 (*heping wending*, peace and stability), and 爱国 (*aiguo*, patriotism). Unitary wholeness refers to personal integrity, family harmony and reunion, and national unity. Peace and stability stress a society that is free from chaos, riots, and wars. Patriotism refers to the affectionate belonging to one's nation or homeland and the commitment to its protection and development. These values are traditions presented in Chinese history and classical literature, accepted by many contemporary Chinese, and transmitted to the next generations through education and life example. Because of these traditional values,

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<sup>80</sup> During the 5,000 year history, Chinese people, especially Hans, tend to reserve the tradition. Wearing the Man queue hairstyle is a perfect example of how the Chinese resist and accept foreign culture. When minority Man ruled China, the rulers commanded Chinese men to wear the Manchu queue to test whether Chinese men submitted to their rule. However, because Confucianism stressed that the hair inherited from the parents was as precious as life, so men had no right to cut their hair. If they wore the Manchu queue, they had to shave the front top of the head. Many Han men revolted against the command, not afraid to pay the price of being beheaded. The rulers had to forsake the forceful implement but allowed Han men to adapt. After Man's rule became stable, many areas of Man's life were sinicized, including the language, education, relationship, and lifestyle. They mingled with Hans. Somehow, many Han men started to accept their rule and wore the Man queue even though not all of them did. When the door of China was open to westerners, western culture had influenced Chinese people a lot. The government eliminated the custom of the Manchu queue after overthrowing the Qing dynasty. Western Christianity had its influence on education, sanitary system, and social life. However, it encountered resistance before the expulsion of western missionaries in the 1950s. After the open policy in the 1980s, western culture and ideology, again, have rushed into China with the merchandise. Chinese people embrace it without much resistance. Whereas, after a period of following and adaptation, they realize that they have their culture and ideology to uphold in the world. A statement says, “我们要走自己的路 (*Women Yao Zou Ziji de Lu*, We have our own journey to take),” which does not imply that Chinese people want to isolate themselves from the world. Instead, they start to acknowledge their role in the global village. They design their journey with a receptive mindset to employ those advanced things for their advantage.

Chinese people feel ashamed of divorce and abandoning seniors. Besides, there has always been a force to unify the national land after it becomes segregated. In the meantime, Chinese people generally cherish peace, seeking a peaceful solution for conflict instead of initially invoking violence. Furthermore, many overseas Chinese feel that their roots are in China or 中原 (*zhongyuan*, Central Land). Many seniors abroad describe going back to China their homeland as 落叶归根 (*luoye guigen*, fallen leaves returning to the roots).

Chinese evangelicals have allowed Christian virtues to replace these values of Chinese identity. One of the manifestations is the non-denominational movement. After 1949, Chinese Christianity entered into a post-denomination era. Many churches, such as *The Little Flock*, claim to adopt non-denominational principles following the example of the primitive churches in the New Testament. The name of government-sanctioned churches generally manifests its Christianity and the name of the local place. Many other churches do not identify themselves with any denominations. For example, Chinese evangelicals from a church network with charismatic spirituality do not want to bear the name “Pentecostal,” even though some overseas leaders with the Pentecostal background have influenced and ask them to affiliate with the Pentecostal movement.<sup>81</sup> Those churches with denominational identities realize that they are easily segregated from others and having dissension among themselves. Thus, they try to shake off their denominational identity, even though they appropriate denominational doctrines for their use.<sup>82</sup> Chinese evangelicals adopt a non-denominational approach out of their evangelical

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<sup>81</sup> Menzies, “Pentecostals in China,” 79.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Hartley, an Anglican with evangelical sympathies defended for the mystics that “the true Mystics are not to be taken for a sect or party in the church, or to be considered as separatists from it, for they renounce all such distinctions both in name and deed, being the only people that never formed a

identity for the promotion of witness to God instead of their Chinese identity, which obliges them to live in harmony with others.

Another manifestation is the cooperation with local governments without compromising their faith. When Chinese evangelical churches flourish in the cities, they learn to get along with their neighbours. For example, because of the limited space in the communities, they need to make an effort to ensure that the worship services do not interrupt the life of their neighbours.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, they have to bear with the neighbours who make complaints against them. Furthermore, when the officers of the local governments show up in the middle of the gathering for investigating, with excuses such as their gathering place is not registered, they stop their meeting and cooperate with the investigations. Even though many evangelicals, especially the leaders, have been sent to detention centers or prisons, they still live in peace with their neighbours and maintain social stability. Most importantly, for many Chinese evangelicals, Christ, who dwells in them, has transformed the Chinese value of peace and order. They are peacefully facing these challenges because they are disciples of Jesus, who faithfully fulfill their passion for witnessing the presence of God among the neighbours and the officers, than because they are good citizens.

A third manifestation is not compliant to the western forces that try to infiltrate China through religions. Chinese evangelicals acknowledge the sensitivity of connecting with overseas Christianity. They uphold their missional goals in China but do not want

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sect.” See Hartley, *Defence of the Mystical Writers*, 373. As quoted in Schmidt, “Making of Modern ‘Mysticism,’” 281. Union with God would break through the boundary of denominations that devotees do not need segregation to acquire their goal of spiritual pursuit. Mystical spirituality manifests the authentic unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Thus, mystical spirituality resonates with Chinese evangelical spirituality in this aspect.

<sup>83</sup> Because the cities are populous, rows and rows of condominiums are the most common housing building. Those non-government-sanctioned churches in the cities gather either in condominiums or offices in the business building.

others to take advantage of them for political gain. Any possible implications of connecting with the infiltration forces may put them on the list of intensive surveillance and investigation, which would ruin their missional goals.<sup>84</sup> Thus, they would take the risk to welcome overseas Christian educational resources rather than financial resources. Those who understand their situation would support according to their reality. Some western people may think western Christianity can be the main force to bring civility and western democracy to China. However, Chinese evangelicals understand that their goal is the Triune God and not any kind of democracy.

Chinese evangelical spirituality in the future will not contradict three primary Chinese values. Instead, it will transform these values. However, because of the complexity of the situations and the demography of Chinese evangelical communities, Chinese evangelicals will continue to present to the public a multifaceted image. They will demonstrate a clear witness of the presence of God only when the majority of them become mature. Whereas, the tension with the government and non-evangelical Chinese will continue to be present.

As evangelicals, if they want to implement this pathway of spiritual theology, they need to interact with mystical traditions without being afraid of losing evangelical identity. As they hold on tight to their Chinese evangelical identity, they build a “secure base” to engage mystical texts and practices.<sup>85</sup> For example, they do not dismiss Madame

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<sup>84</sup> When some so-called “Christian” from western countries, some of whom being Chinese, interview Chinese evangelical leaders, they imply in various contexts that if all Christians in China are “united” together to protest against the CCP and the government, they will change the political system in China. This kind of claim does not help Chinese evangelicals. Instead, it makes their situations more challenging. Many Chinese evangelicals uphold that they would pray and rely on God to fulfill the missional goal instead of being involved in such political issues. See Yu, “Wei Jidujiao Jiatingjiaohui Tuomin,” para. 27.

<sup>85</sup> McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 116. “Secure base” is the concept brought by John Bowlby, along with his attachment theory. See Bowlby, *Secure Base*, 10–12.

Guyon's books because of her Roman Catholic background. Instead, they interpret the texts from a Chinese evangelical perspective.<sup>86</sup> They can easily relate the content to biblical teachings and examine them with biblical passages. They also tend to identify their suffering for Christ with Guyon's life, which was inflicted by her family members and the Roman Catholic churches. Furthermore, these Chinese evangelicals admire Guyon because of her life transformation. Finally, even though Guyon did not actively participate in evangelism with the approaches adopted by Chinese evangelicals, they affirm that Guyon is a good witness for God among her family members and in public, which leads some people to Christ.

Therefore, to build a solid foundation for interacting with mystical traditions, Chinese evangelicals, first of all, are to equip their groups to build up a solid evangelical identity so that they would not be swayed by the "dross" teachings of mystical traditions. Second, Chinese evangelicals would not build up spiritual theology based on the experiences of the mystics but their own in their context. They would learn from mystical theologians to interpret these experiences from an evangelical theological perspective, purposefully pursuing the union with God, thus experiencing and witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit in life transformation. Furthermore, since Chinese evangelicals do not want to identify themselves with any movement, they may not accept the label "mysticism." Thus, instead of introducing mystical texts under the corpus of literature with the title including "mystical" or "mysticism," it is better to present them individual patristic or classical texts with the review and interpretation from Chinese evangelical perspectives and provide a guideline on how to incorporate them into their life context.

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<sup>86</sup> Their approach is resonant with Daniel Wigner's research on the approach adopted by the emergent churches in western nations to appropriate mystical practices. See Wigner, "Spiritual Borrowing," ii.

Furthermore, the leadership of Chinese evangelicals play an essential role in bringing the change to contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality under current political and religious situations.<sup>87</sup> Both Chinese culture and Christianity values the role model of leadership. Chinese evangelical leaders can apply the social identity approach to implement the proposal of Chinese evangelical spirituality. To make sure that their groups will internalize the change, the leaders need to exercise their influence through four dimensions: prototypicality, advancement, entrepreneurship, and impresarioship.

First, they are the model members that demonstrate Chinese evangelical spirituality (prototypicality). The members will scrutinize their models and follow their steps directly or indirectly. Second, they act as a champion of change for the benefit of the group instead of for themselves (advancement). They move along the Chinese evangelical spiritual pathway and gradually develop towards the vision of spirituality. Since the witness for the presence of God includes both individuals and groups, the leaders need to cast the spiritual vision as the group vision and implement the model, which they want to establish among group members. Third, they should not present themselves as spiritual elites who stand at a high level of the spiritual journey. Instead, they claim that they are pilgrims like the group members. They share their experience of struggle and challenge during every stage of the journey for followers to acknowledge that they are one of them. These leaders also need to present to members the whole journey of a devotee, including the early stages and the mature status that may be obtained by a faithful disciple (entrepreneurship). Fourth, the leaders also need to build a

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<sup>87</sup> Suzanne Ogden notes that in China, the authority or power resides in individuals and the core groups rather than organizations or institutions. See Ogden, "China's Unresolved Issues," 87.

structure to stimulate members to participate and ensure that their identification with the vision of spiritual theology matters (impresarioship).

Social identity research shows that these leaders demonstrating the above four dimensions are influential in leading the changes that can become part of long-term group identity.<sup>88</sup> Jesus Christ showed an example of these four functions and exhorted his disciples to follow his example to lead his people. Jesus' example and exhortation on leadership prepare Christian leaders to guide his people to welcome the renewal brought by God's kingdom and make it a persistent change.

Furthermore, Christ gives the church five types of leaders to build up the body of Christ until "we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God . . ." (Eph 4:13 NASB). Thus, Christ's promise guarantees the existence of these influential leaders in the church to achieve the vision of Jesus' spirituality. These five types of leaders bear the gifts of Christ to exercise their spiritual authority to make change a reality among evangelicals. Further research on these leaders facilitating the change brought by a selective appropriation of Christian mysticism will contribute to the social identity theory from a practical theological perspective.

These five types of leaders are Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers (Eph 4:11). These leaders can fulfill the four dimensions of leadership to implement the future spiritual pathway. According to Ernest Best, these leaders, not believers in general, do not depend on anyone and any systems for selecting them and giving them the titles but depend on Christ to manifest their spiritual gifts.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Steffens et al., "Leadership," 1002.

<sup>89</sup> Best, *Ephesians*, 394. When my proposal is implemented, I will establish a Chinese Evangelical Spirituality Research Center to recruit those believers who demonstrate these five spiritual gifts through service (see Appendix 2).

In summary, my proposal considers practical approaches to implementing the spiritual pathway based on appropriating mystical spirituality. It not only builds a “safe base” for Chinese evangelicals to explore the change, which not only attempts to preserve Chinese evangelical identity but also makes sure that they have ownership of the spiritual pathway through the social identity approach. The involvement of the five types of leaders granted by Christ to the churches would transform the application of the social identity approach in this proposal. These five types of leaders work together in the four dimensions: prototypicality, advancement, entrepreneurship, and impresarioship, to lead group members to identify with them, to pursue the spiritual vision of Christ, and to witness the work of the Holy Spirit during their spiritual journey of acquiring full union with God.

## CONCLUSION AND SIGNIFICANCE

### 1. Significance

This dissertation has worked on the pathway of Chinese evangelical spirituality, emphasizing life transformation through pursuing the union with God, by appropriating mystical spirituality. The pathway demonstrates the following characteristics towards the goal of spiritual theology. First, it looks into what a fully developed spirituality can be. Second, it presents an extended scope of Chinese evangelical groups and their spirituality. Third, it manifests an eternal perspective instead of limiting to temporal-spiral dimension. Last, it involves the Triune God instead of only one or two persons of the Trinity.

Furthermore, this pathway initiates the research on Chinese spiritual theology, based on the reality of the historical root and current situation of Chinese evangelicalism. The focus of the past and recent studies on Chinese Christianity is the impact of the TSPM, the rapid growth of the number of Chinese Christians, and contextualization or indigenization effort made by Chinese Protestants, with which western Christians may be familiar. The research of spirituality that draws attention to is limited to Nee's spiritual theology. In light of the rare research on contemporary Chinese evangelical spirituality, this dissertation would demonstrate the attempt to make a breakthrough in this area. Therefore, it meets the need for research on Chinese spirituality.

Moreover, this dissertation, which focuses on spirituality, is also a support for the development of Chinese doctrinal theology that it will not go astray into mere intellectual

study but embrace the empirical dimension of theology. Western Christian scholars have realized that the current increasing emphasis on spirituality is to restore the traditional approach towards theology as lived theology.<sup>1</sup> While the awareness on the importance of spirituality is growing among western Christians, Chinese evangelical theology is facing the challenge to give up the legacy of lived theology. Cultural Christians and Sino-Christian theology as academic research become popular in the universities and among highly educated Christians, which has demonstrated the tendency to segregate intellectual pursuit and spiritual development.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation proposes to utilize the resources provided by cultural Christians and Sino-Christian theology for the development of spiritual theology as well as to avoid anti-intellect intuition and segregation of intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

This dissertation also provides the direction and the goal for the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality and gives practical suggestions for moving toward the goal. Contemporary Chinese evangelicals are alerted to the shallow spiritual status that has compromised their passion for evangelism and mission. They acknowledge the vigorous work of the Holy Spirit in China. However, they cannot tell the main patterns of the work of the Holy Spirit and the messages that they deliver. This dissertation, through the engagement with the study on mystical spirituality, proposes possible patterns and delivered messages, encouraging Chinese evangelicals to do further research on the work

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<sup>1</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 4–5.

<sup>2</sup> Lam, *Sino-Christian Theology*, 21. Sino-Christian theology “usually refers to an intellectual movement emerged in the Chinese-speaking world, particularly Mainland China, since the late 1980s, although this term is understood sometimes literally and in a broader sense to cover all theological discourses written in the Chinese language.” Most of the scholars contributing to Sino-Christian theology have no Christian theological training. They approach theology as it is an academic discipline of human sciences or social sciences. See Lam, *Sino-Christian Theology*, 1, 3. Many cultural Christians have rare participation in Christian life. Besides, many of them are non-believers. It is hard to believe that they have an eager desire for spiritual growth.

of the Holy Spirit among them. The guidance of this dissertation and future studies will lead the spiritual journey of Chinese evangelicals toward maturity. They also encourage each Chinese evangelical group to perceive other Chinese evangelical groups as an indispensable part of the blueprint, thus promoting the unity of Chinese evangelicals, which is a distinction of spiritual maturity.

Furthermore, this dissertation has demonstrated the significance of upholding the authority of the Bible in the development of spiritual theology. Even though spiritual theology tends to stress the role of experiences, Chinese evangelicals do not give away their discretion that they should examine experiences through the lens of the Bible, upholding the uncompromised authority of the Scripture and stressing the role of illumination from the work of the Holy Spirit on understanding the Scripture. Thus, it provides an example for western evangelicals, who are facing the challenge with the role of the Scripture gradually losing its significant weight in the research on spirituality.

Moreover, this dissertation has shown the influence of the apologetic feature on their spiritual development. Chinese evangelicals emphasize their responsibility of evangelicalism and mission. To fulfill their mission that is part of their spirituality, they have to build a boundary against Chinese traditions, other religions, popular cults, and the political movement. Amid the advocacy to adopt methods from Zen or other religions for the development of spiritual practice, this dissertation provides a different voice that it is plausible to develop spiritual theology without employing non-Christian approaches that would compromise the witness of the lordship of God in the Chinese context. The boundaries are necessary for the sake of witness as God's people, which is in accord with

the goal of spirituality presented in this dissertation: full union with God equates confessing the lordship of God in all areas.<sup>3</sup>

Another significance of this dissertation lies in its contribution to practical theology. First, it considers the general social-cultural context of Chinese evangelicals and the immediate context of various groups for their practical development of spirituality. Furthermore, it proposes to adopt the disciplines of social science that are appropriate for Chinese people to make changes in spiritual growth. Meanwhile, it stresses the relationship between these disciplines and the work of the Holy Spirit. It holds that the work of the Holy Spirit through God's Word is transforming these disciplines. It also advocates that the researchers should be open to the work of the Holy Spirit and adjust their approaches if it is necessary. Therefore, this dissertation places the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality in the family of practical theology and contributes to the research in this field.

## **2. Further Research**

This dissertation has presented a proposal for the development of Chinese evangelical spirituality. It leaves several areas for future studies. One is the fieldwork on mystical experiences of various Chinese evangelical groups. The pathway provides an overall guide. However, when Chinese evangelical leaders explore the spiritual development, their interaction with mystical spirituality cannot be isolated from their group members' experience and current understanding of mystical experiences. Since mystical theology is developed around mystical experiences, the research on mystical experiences among Chinese evangelicals can help figure out particular differences and common grounds

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<sup>3</sup> Beach, *Church in Exile*, 175.

between Chinese evangelical spirituality and mystical spirituality.<sup>4</sup> The researchers can establish a center to collect the data of mystical experiences among Chinese evangelicals for various researches.<sup>5</sup>

Second is the fieldwork Chinese evangelical leaders, including their theological and spiritual situation and their role in employing the proposal. The implementation of the proposal relies heavily on the leaders. An investigation of their status is essential. The research can also become a process of recruitment to invite those who have a passion for spiritual development to participate. The research on the leadership's role in implementation can contribute to the social identity theory from a practical theological perspective.

Third is the comparative study on evangelical spirituality between Mainland Chinese and those abroad. As this dissertation upholds the overall and holistic view of spirituality, Mainland Chinese evangelicalism in this dissertation cannot be isolated from the work of the Holy Spirit among overseas Chinese evangelicals. Because the political and socio-cultural context may not change in the long term, distinctions between Chinese evangelicals in Mainland China and abroad will remain and last for quite a prolonged period. For example, as Milton Wan Wai-yiu notes, those Christians in western countries cannot judge that Chinese evangelicals in Mainland China are not spiritually mature in

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<sup>4</sup> Chinese evangelicals have heard many testimonies of miracles and mystical experiences but rarely conduct related and systematic research. They record many leaders' mystical experiences in their biographies. Whereas, the account of mystical experiences from the laypersons such as Detang Hung is unusual, even though it is significant because some people comment that Huang has a will like St. Francis of Assisi. See Ling, *Huangdetang*, 6. Huang's description of his mystical experiences includes the process of distinguishing his thoughts from the guidance from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> Paper's research on the mystical experience has benefited from the pool of data collected by the Religious Experience Research Center. See Paper, *Mystic Experience*, 62. Chinese Evangelical Spirituality Research Center that I want to establish may play a role in collecting the data.

social concern because they do not protest against the government through parades.<sup>6</sup>

However, along with the expectation of the link between them growing intense, a clear understanding of their similarities and differences is necessary.

Fourth is the comparative study between Chinese evangelical spirituality and Roman Catholic spirituality in China. Because Chinese Roman Catholics have a closer relationship with overseas Roman Catholics, due to the tie with the Pope in the Vatican, they present an ardent protest against the government-sanction movement. Meanwhile, Roman Catholic traditional spirituality, including some aspects of mystical spirituality, may have considerably influenced them. Understanding how Roman Catholic spiritual traditions affect Chinese people in the socio-cultural and religious context would provide Chinese evangelicals with a better understanding of how they should interact with mystical spirituality, while sustaining their evangelical identity.

Fifth is study of the local Chinese evangelical spirituality. This dissertation classifies Chinese evangelicals into five groups due to the limitation of the research. However, Chinese geography is vast, and regional culture varies.<sup>7</sup> Some local regions implement the religious policy strictly, while others do not.<sup>8</sup> It is necessary to research the local spirituality for better understanding and forming concrete practices for implementing the pathway for a profound spiritual life.

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<sup>6</sup> See Wan's speech on Christian Participation on Political Activities posted on youtube. Wan, "Jidutu yu Zhengzhi Canyu," 13:00–13:29.

<sup>7</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism*, 33. The personal interest of local authorities, individuals, and their families or groups may compromise the implementation.

APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE OF THE HISTORY OF CHINESE EVANGELICALISM

Time	Major Events	Main Characteristics of the Context
1807	Arrival of Morrison in Macau	The connection with Chinese people other than doing business was forbidden; the death penalty for Chinese to teach foreigners Chinese
1814	The baptism of the first Protestant convert, Gao Cai, by Morrison	Believers hesitated to confess in public, facing the attack of the idol-worshippers and the persecution of the government
1823	The first Protestant Chinese minister, Fa Liang, ordained by Morrison	Chinese Christian leaders with few companions facing enormous challenges from the family, the community, and the government
1842	A breakthrough in the growth of converts without the hindrance of the Chinese government	After the First Opium War, western missionaries and Chinese believers got the protection from the foreign militaries; many missionaries involved in social concerns for evangelization; some Chinese became “Christians” because of material or political advantages
1865	The establishment of <i>China Inland Mission</i> by Hudson Taylor	<i>China Inland Mission</i> focused on converting the souls through life exemplar instead of involving in social concerns
1900	Martyrs by the Boxer Uprising	Western missionaries were identified with their imperialist government and Chinese believers were perceived as traitors; rumours provoked hostility against Christians
1917	Establishment of <i>The True Jesus Church</i> by Paul Wei	The indigenous movement became stronger; churches without denominational affiliation were established; the tendency of syncretism in the indigenous movement
1920	Chinese ministers outnumbered western missionaries	More Chinese believers took up the leadership after the repression of the Boxer Uprising; more intellectuals converted; coalitions among various churches and denominations focusing on training Chinese leaders, many of whom were intellectuals.

1922	The eleventh World Christian Student Fellowship Assembly held at Qinghua University in Beijing	Triggered anti-Christian movement and anti-imperialist movement; force the government to control the foreigners' authority over social system including education and hospital; political factors greatly influenced the development of Chinese Christianity
1927	The Establishment of the unified Chinese church ( <i>The Church of Christ in China</i> )	The conflict between evangelicals and modernists/liberals became intensive
1927	Establishment of <i>The Jesus Family</i> by Dianying Jing	The communal support provided by the churches attracted many Chinese who suffered under the warlords and the bandits; Christian mystical experiences were confused with those of local cults
1927	Initiation of <i>The Little Flock</i> movement by Watchman Nee	Actively interacted with western missionaries in China and Christian leaders abroad; appropriated western Christian teachings to Chinese context; integrated active evangelistic activities with the spiritual growth of individuals and the churches; searching for the similarity between Christianity and Confucian traditions
The 1930s	The rapid growth of Chinese evangelicals with the support of indigenous fundraising and intercession	Foreign missionaries who greatly involved in social concerns retreated because of lack of funds due to the depression and wars
1944	Establishment of Chongqing Theological Seminary with Chonggui Chen as the president	More Chinese evangelicals took over the leadership because the western missionaries left China because of Sino-Japanese war; Chinese evangelicals resisted the Japanese control through the North China Church of Christ led by Japanese Protestants; Chinese evangelical works spread to north-west and south-west of China; China Inter-Varsity and China Inland Mission promoted the evangelical work among the college students
1948–1949	Preparing for the new atheist regime	The foreign missionaries and some Chinese leaders retreated to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Asian countries
1954	Establishment of the TSPM	All the foreign missionaries were expelled; the western financial resource was cut off; Chinese evangelicals became complete independent of overseas Christians; controversy over the cooperation with the TSMP became intensive; many evangelicals were persecuted because they resisted joining the TSMP

1958–1978	Imprisonment of many evangelical leaders; closure of many churches and public service	China was under the rule of the left-wing political forces; one of the goals of ten-year cultural revolution was to eliminate religions; Chinese evangelicals
1980	Establishment of the China Christian Council (CCC)	The CCC took care of the development of pastoral and congregational nurturing and spiritual development, working side by side with the TSPM that had heavy political duties; Chinese evangelicals were under the influence of Ding's theology: justification by love
1982	Issue of Document Nineteen: the Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during our Country's Socialist Period	Normal religious activities under the principles of Document Nineteen were sanctioned; all religious activities should be practiced at the places approved by the government departments
1991	Issue of Document Six	Document Six stressed a strict against foreign infiltration through any religious activities and affirmed that all the house churches without registration should be shut down; evangelicals who are suspicious of connecting with foreign infiltrative forces were persecuted; the churches without registration are under the threat to be closed
1990–	The rapid growth of evangelicals because of the evangelistic passion	The needs for theological training and spiritual growth are enormous; foreign missionaries again enter China; the connection between Chinese evangelicals and western evangelicals is growing
2018	The effect of the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs	The local governments begin to carry out the regulations strictly and strategically; Chinese evangelicals are losing more their public space for practicing their faith

## APPENDIX 2: CHINESE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY RESEARCH CENTER

Chinese Evangelical Spirituality Research Center (hereafter CESRC) will lead the implement of the proposal in this dissertation. In the contemporary Chinese context, it is beneficial for CESRC to appear to the public as an academic organization in China. It works for the maturity of Chinese evangelical spirituality. Therefore, even though appropriating resources from Christian mysticism is the primary consideration of CESRC, it eventually is not the only way. When CESRC works to draw upon mystical tradition, they do not attempt to orient Chinese evangelical groups toward becoming mystical groups. Instead, they provide these groups with resources and educate them in appropriating the resources that they choose at their disciplined discretion. They can also conduct research on their mystical experience and the effect of the spiritual status because of appropriation. Furthermore, they should empower these groups to reflect theologically on their encounter with mystical spirituality, like what I have done in chapter 4. The board of CESRC will coordinate recruitment, research, translation, publication, education, and other responsibilities to facilitate the proposal.

A major role that CESRC will play is to recruit leaders among Chinese evangelicals. These leaders will carry out the detailed tasks to implement the proposal. They are not limited to those who are ordained or appointed as deacons, elders, or pastors

of the churches.<sup>1</sup> Instead, CESRC should discern the work of the Holy Spirit that empowers the manifestation of the spiritual functions such as pioneering and itinerant leadership in “Apostles,” sharp application of the biblical teachings in contemporary situations in “Prophets,” effective witness to nonbelievers in “Evangelists,” personal nurturing and caring in “Pastors,” and expounding and teaching in “Teachers.” Andrew Lincoln argues that if these leaders regularly exercise their services, their churches would recognize them.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when CESRC recruits the leaders, they need to consider the recommendation of the evangelical groups. Moreover, CESRC should conduct further research from theological and practical perspectives on the recruitment of the leaders to implement my proposal. Due to the limitation of this dissertation and the necessity of fieldwork, I leave this research to the board of CESRC when they set out to investigate the situation of Chinese evangelical leaders from various groups.<sup>3</sup>

“Apostles” work among the Chinese evangelical groups, casting the vision of the spiritual pathway. They play a primary role in breaking the segregation of different groups and orienting Chinese evangelical spirituality towards a holistic vision. Furthermore, they initiate the preparatory work for propagating the spiritual pathway. They strategically introduce and adapt mystical (patristic/classical) texts for various Chinese evangelical groups. They need to work with cultural Christians, Chinese University Presses, Hong Kong and Taiwan Christian academic and publishing institutions, and overseas Christian scholars to translate mystical texts and evangelical reviews into Chinese and distribute them among Chinese evangelical mass. They should

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<sup>1</sup> The TSPM and the religious bureaus have the authority to assign the pastors to the government-sanctioned churches and approve the ordination of the pastors.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 252.

<sup>3</sup> The research will include a theological reflection on the prototypicality, advancement, entrepreneurship, and impresarioship of Christian leaders.

also encourage research on the mystical experiences of Chinese evangelicals. They can guide the comparative studies on the mystical experiences of Chinese evangelicals and that of the mystics and further explore what factors should be considered when appropriating mystical spirituality to Chinese evangelicalism. Additionally, they encourage research on the life of evangelical leaders to make the prototypes known to other Chinese evangelical groups.

“Prophets,” cooperating with “Apostles,” cast the vision of the spiritual pathway among their evangelical groups. They have a keen insight into why their groups need to draw upon mystical tradition for spiritual maturity and how they can do that. Since “Prophets” are sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit, in understanding the Scripture and its application, they can take the chief responsibility of presenting to their groups the endorsement of the Scripture for the pathway. They need to explain from a biblical perspective the preparatory works led by “Apostles,” their current spiritual reality, and how they can apply the spiritual pathway step by step until they achieve the goal. They are the liaisons between “Apostles” and the local evangelical groups. Even though “Prophets” are not necessarily official leaders of the institutional churches, they should ensure their groups that they attempt to advance their spiritual benefit, to attain their support. They can benefit from the endorsement of “Apostles” to build up their credibility.

CESRC must highlight the work of the Holy Spirit through “Evangelists” when they implement the proposal. Such an effort enhances the Chinese evangelical identity of their project, which acts as a “secure base” for them to appropriate mystical traditions. Furthermore, “Evangelists” acquire abundant opportunities to encounter the Holy Spirit that validate their intensive evangelistic activities. They tend to be persistently conscious

of the presence of God. Thus, they are recognizable examples for those who pursue God and play a distinctive role in critically correlating evangelical spirituality mystical spirituality.

CESRC would empower “Teachers” to play an essential role in encouraging local group members to participate in pursuing the spiritual pathway and make them feel that they matter in spiritual development. Instructed by CESRC, “Teachers” not only teach the texts and examples of the leaders intellectually and ardently but also present to the members the narrative of the fellowship of the Triune God, following the non-formal teaching example of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They also guide the members to explore the work of the Holy Spirit in the mystical tradition and discern the spiritual experience with them, embracing the goal that lays before them and practicing spiritual disciplines that prepare them for achieving the goal.

“Pastors” tend to focus on building an intimate relationship with the group members through spiritual mentoring and spiritual direction. Their close fellowship with the group members under the guidance of the Holy Spirit provides them with many opportunities to discern the gifts among the members and explore their mystical experiences. Thus, they can help CESRC and “Apostles” to recruit different types of leaders.

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